

THE SIKH GURUS AND THE SIKH SOCIETY

A Study in Social Analysis

Niharranjan Ray

1970

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*a course of three lectures delivered at the
Punjabi University, Patiala in commemo-
ration of the Quincentennial of the birth of
Guru Nanak on August 4, 5 and 6, 1969
with two appendices*

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INSCRIBED
TO THE MEMORY OF THE
SIKH GURUS

PREFACE

This book contains three lectures which I gave at the Punjabi University, Patiala, in August, 1969, and two appendices the first of which purports to be a paper that I presented at an international seminar held at the same university a month later and the second, an address that I had given to introduce a seminar on Guru Gobind Singh, Sikhism and Indian Society held at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla, in June, 1967. Since the last two items happened to be closely related to the subject of the three lectures I thought that it would not be a bad idea to append these to the lectures.

I have chosen not to change the language and form of the lectures in which they were originally written and delivered.

The lectures and the appendices do not aim at bringing to view any original material or any factual data that had hitherto remained unknown. Indeed, they are frankly interpretative, being based on materials that were made available in print by worthier scholars. I have indicated my indebtedness to them in the notes and references at the end of each chapter and in the bibliography at the end of the book.

I am grateful to the authorities of the Punjabi University for having undertaken to publish this book under their imprint.

Simla, January 1, 1970

Nihar Ranjan Ray

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INTRODUCTORY WORDS

I am deeply grateful to my esteemed friend Sardar Kirpal Singh Narang, Vice-Chancellor of this University, and to his equally esteemed colleagues in the Syndicate for their having asked me to deliver a short course of three lectures on any aspect of the life and message of Guru Nānak. I understand, this short series of lectures has been conceived as one of several items of the celebration at this young seat of learning, in commemoration of the completion of five hundred years of the birth of Guru Nānak, the founder of Sikhism and the Sikh society. It is a matter of sincere gratification to any student of contemporary Indian life and culture that this University has been seeking to dedicate itself to an academic study at the highest level, of the history and culture of the Panjab, now sadly and unfortunately divided into more than two parts, her language and religion, her ethnography and social economy etc. in general, and of Sikhism and the Sikh society in particular. One only wishes that all such studies will be pursued, and I love to imagine that they are being pursued, not from any emotional point of view—regional, denominational or even national—but from a broad humanistic stand-point and a strictly academic approach, an approach that seeks to apply to any study in the fields of the humanities and the social sciences, the concepts and methods and tools and techniques of modern intellectual disciplines in these fields in an inter-disciplinary manner. An intellectual commitment is a jealous mistress; it brooks no personal prides and prejudices, nor any emotional involvement in things other than that of the mind itself.

While I gratefully recognise and appreciate your kindness in asking me to deliver the three lectures that would

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follow I must say that this kindness has been misplaced. I cannot but confess that I have no competence to speak on Guru Nānak or on the faith he and those who followed him, subscribed to. When I say this I am not just indulging in usual professional humility. I have indeed serious reasons to say so. First, Sikhism and the Sikh society has never been my special field of study, and my knowledge in this regard never extended beyond that of a student of Indian history and culture. Secondly, while I recognize, may even have the experience of what are called matters of the human spirit, I am not a man of religion in the usually understood sense of the term. One of the tallest figures in the mystic Sant tradition of medieval India to which Guru Nānak belonged—I am speaking of one, Dīna Chāndīsā, from Bengal—says in one of his songs :

*marama nā jāne dharama bākhāne
emati āsaye yārā
kāj nāi sakhi tāder kathāy
bāhire rakun tārā*

knowing not the inner meaning, the
truth of it all, there are people who
choose to explain and interpret *dharma*.
I have no use for such people, my dear friend
Let them stay out, please.

I too, am one of those who are ignorant of the inner meaning of the spiritual experience of the great Gurus and of Sikhism, and should therefore have been kept out. But having accepted the gracious invitation I decided that I should keep myself away altogether from any reference, narration and analysis of any mystical and supra-rational spiritual experience of the great Gurus as well as from their messages that are exclusively informed by such experience. Instead, I would confine myself to the purely historical

socio-religious and socio-economic aspects of their lives, activities and teachings that affected the total secular and religious life of the people amongst whom they found themselves and whom they lived and died for.

Having taken that decision I was confronted with another difficulty. Here too, I would request you to please accept a second confession of mine. I am somewhat inadequately tutored in the Panjabi language as well as in Persian, the two languages in which the Gurus used to articulate themselves and in which are held in the main, almost all the original sources and source-materials. Whatever little therefore I happen to have learnt about the Gurus, their lives, activities and teachings, the history of the Sikhs and their culture, a good part of it is largely derived from secondary sources and from available but inadequate translations in English and other modern north Indian languages. To these sources I have indicated my indebtedness in a bibliography of selected titles provided at the end.

Confessions over and my conscience made clear I would now proceed to explain briefly the scheme of my three lectures. I propose to speak on the ten Sikh Gurus, from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh, with special reference to these two greats and other great, Guru Arjun, the fifth Guru. These three Gurus, to my mind, present to us the three great turning points in the history and culture of Sikhism and of the Sikh society; this will be evident, I believe, as I proceed. I propose to speak about them with particular reference to the evolution of the Sikh religion and the Sikh society, and since I do so, I shall devote my first lecture to the general social milieu in northern India, especially in the Panjab, during the well-nigh two centuries and a half spanned by the ten Gurus. The period, one would easily note, is all but coterminous with the rise, growth and attainment of the peak of Mughal imperial power and glory. Having spoken of the social

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milieu I shall proceed to speak of the social message that emerged out of the teachings of Guru Nānak and the continuity he wanted to impart to that message by the formal appointment of a successor to the leadership of the socio-religious community he had already brought into being. I shall follow up the evolution, expansion and transformation of this message through the succession of Gurus till when the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh founded the *Khālsā* or the *Panth* and gave to the expanding community a symbol, the *Sri Guru Granth Sāheb* in which was vested the authority of the Guru, and a discipline which one could transgress only at the sufferance of his individual conscience or/and social excommunication. This will form the content of my second lecture. The third and last lecture I propose to devote to the mission of the society that Guru Nānak conceived and aimed at projecting, how that mission was slowly but steadily reared up by the successive Gurus, how new contours and new dimensions were added to the original mission and how finally the Sikh society emerged as a strong social force in the Panjab and the neighbouring regions at any rate, which it still continues to be.

The facts and situations I should be making use of, are all very well-known to all students of the history of the Panjab and of the Sikh Gurus and Sikhism, and hence no citations are necessary, I believe. Frankly, I have drawn all facts and situations from dependable secondary authorities on the subject and all but exclusively from one and only primary source, the *Sri Guru Granth Sāheb* itself. If I should not be using many facts and situations that I could with advantage for my purpose, the reason is that such facts and situations do not, to my mind, stand the scrutiny of the laws of historical evidence. Yet, I must warn my listeners that I am attempting no straight history either of Sikhism or of the illustrious Sikh Gurus : this has been done

already by more than several worthier predecessors.¹ All that I should be essaying to do is what may roughly be called an analysis in social history, that is, to attempt an analysis of the facts, factors and forces that went into the making of the Sikh society which happens to be an integral part of the larger Indian society, and yet a definitely distinct, definitely identifiable community of people with an integrity of their own.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The name and works of such predecessors will be found in the bibliography of selected works provided at the end. I would only draw attention to one of them, a very recent publication, *Guru Nānak and the Sikh Religion*, by W. H. McLeod, which to my mind, is a fine example of critical scholarship. It is by far the most definitive biographical account of the Guru and his teachings published so far, and I have drawn largely from this book insofar as factual data are concerned. Yet, it seems, to me at any rate, that the author has been somewhat hyper-critical of the *janamsākhis* as sources of history. While I have nothing to say against his critical method of analysis, I should think that he could have made a distinction between a historical fact and a historical situation, in which case much of what he has found historically inadmissible, would have perhaps been otherwise. For instance, McLeod doubted the factual authenticity of the *janamsākhi* tradition of Guru Nānak's visit to Ceylon. Now, Ceylon has very recently yielded an inscription belonging to the sixteenth century, which says that an Indian religious scholar and preacher, Janakāchārya by name, went to Sīhala or Laṅka and at the instance of the then Sinhalese king, entered into more than one religious disputation with more than one religious scholar. Janakāchārya's mission was unsuccessful, but the time and context of the inscription leaves no room for doubt that this Janakāchārya was none other than Nānakāchārya or Guru Nānak. Here then is a historical situation which in the context of Guru Nānak's life and activities and in that of the times to which he belonged, was not altogether unlikely.

Critical and definitive biographies of Guru Arjun and Guru Gobind Singh like the one on Guru Nānak by McLeod, are still a desideratum.

Lecture One

THE MILIEU

I

The ten Gurus who evolved, consolidated and gave a definite shape and a recognizable and meaningful form to what has come to be characterized by historians and sociologists as the youngest organized and institutionalized religion and religious community of any significance, Sikhism and the Sikh society, span the entire period of the last days of the Delhi Sultanate and the political domination of by far the largest part of the country by the six Grand Mughals, from Babur to Aurangzeb. This domination was, politically and administratively speaking, almost a total one but for a few very small pockets in northern India and a considerable segment of the far South, roughly speaking. Insofar as the land washed by the five rivers, that is, the Panjab of those days was concerned there was no small pocket even that was not under the strong central political and administrative control of Delhi and Agra. One must however recognize that there was a cluster of small, all but politically inconsequential states of Hindu chieftains, mainly of Rajput origin, sheltered in the valleys of what was until recently known as the Panjab Himalaya. Away from the mainstream of life and civilization, relatively safe and secure from the trials and turmoils and social and political upheavals that have been shaking the plains down below from about the eleventh century onwards, these small hill states had become small feudal citadels of an ossified religion—of Brahmanical Hinduism, of orthodoxy and obscurantism—and all but oblivious of the challenges that Hinduism and Hindu society

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were facing on the plains. Such challenges were the strongest and most acute in the plains of the Panjab than anywhere else in India.

Geographically and geo-politically the Panjab occupies an area of northern India, that had to bear the brunt of the frontal challenge of all the peoples and cultures that were borne on the wings of history from outside of the north-western borders on to the northern plains of India, and this from the earliest days known to history. Entering through the north-western passes or from across the northern mountains, all foreign elements found in the fertile and tropical plains of the Panjab their first haven where they could spread out and settle down if they chose to do so. Later was the time when they could think of, if they wanted to, to push forward further to the east and to the south. The Achaemenians conquered and made India west of the Indus and its tributaries, a part of their sprawling empire. Alexander pushed right up to the Beas, and though he went back with his army, the strongest political and cultural hold of the Hellenistic Greeks and following them, of the Parthians, was on the Panjab. Almost simultaneously began the southward swoop down of the central Asian pastoral and nomadic peoples, avalanche like and in wave after wave, beginning in the pre-Christian centuries with the Sakas and Kushāns and ending only with the Islamised Turks, Afghans and Mughals in the thirteenth to the sixteenth century. To these migrations belonged among others, the Ābhīras, the Hūṇas, the Jāts, the Gurjaras or Gujars, the pre-Islamic Turushkas or Turks, to mention only a few. Then there were the Buddhist and Hindu Sāhis of Afghanistan, who have also to be taken into account. Panjab happened to be the land to challenge and confront them all with all attendant shocks, surprises and disturbances, settle them down, incorporate and integrate them as far as her people could, and in the process to be

transformed by them, before the foreign peoples and their cultures, transformed somewhat in their turn, could push forward and spread further inland. There must have been a few more peoples and cultures that Panjab had to grapple with, but what I have said is, I believe, indication enough of the nature of the situation.

What the effect would be of such continuous challenges and pressures on the land and its people, can easily be imagined. Ethnically and culturally Panjab became a great laboratory where many ethnic types and cultures became eventually fused into one homogenous people and culture. The process started quite early in history. This was the land which was known to the composers of Vedic hymns as *Brahmavarta* where were sung for the first time the hymns of at least the first three *Vedas*. It is significant that the medieval and modern Panjabi language still retains certain traits of Vedic Sanskrit much more than any other north Indian language does. Yet, by about the beginning of the Christian era, if not earlier, this land of the five rivers came to be branded by the priestly authors of the *Smṛtis* as impure, evidently because Brahmanism of *Āryavarta* where the majority of the *Smṛti* texts were presumably composed, considered the people of the Panjab as having been contaminated by contacts with foreign peoples and cultures. By about the fourth and fifth centuries of the Christian era there were still further such contacts and contaminations, for instance, with the Hellenistic Greeks, Parthians, *Sakas*, *Sassanians*, *Kushāns*, *Sogdians*, *Ābhiras* and the *Hūṇas*, perhaps also with the *Jāts*, as a result of which social organisation of India lying roughly to west of the Indus and its tributaries, seems to have assumed a form which was distinct from other areas of the country. *Buddhaghosha*, a very well-known and erudite Buddhist scholar belonging to about the fifth century A.D., refers in one of his commentaries to this

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region which he knew to have had a social organization characterized by a two-fold or *dvi-varna* system of social classification, the *Ayyas* (Aryas) and the *Dasas*, instead of a four-fold, that is, the *chaturvarna* system as in the rest of India. He also says that the communities of people of this region belonged to the *Pārasaka vappa*, perhaps meaning thereby that they were mostly of Iranian-Central Asian origin. Whatever the validity or otherwise of Buddhaghosha's statement, the fact remains that the Indus valley communities of people were, socially speaking, somewhat distinct and different from those in the interior regions, who had come to accept and fall into the pattern of social organization of Brahmanism of which the system of *jāti* was the pivot.¹ As one proceeds along the arrow line of time, other communities of foreign and autochthonous tribal peoples were incorporated and integrated with the local population, and since agriculture happened to be the main prop of economic life, the people of the region, were slowly but surely and eventually, obliged to accept the *jāti* system of production organization and hence to an extent, the Brahmanical social system as well. But Panjab does not seem to have known and experienced the countless number of proliferation and ramification of the vertical *jāti* grades and sub-grades nor the socio-religious rigours of the Brahmanical *jāti* hierarchy. Indeed, Smārta-Paurāṇik early medieval Brahmanism does not seem to have had a very strong hold on the people of this region even during the centuries preceding the advent of Islam and consolidation of Muslim political authority. One reason of this may have been the prevalence for long of Mahāyāna Buddhism and its patrons who were mostly of foreign origin; but this cannot certainly be the only reason. A more important reason may be found in the changing and challenging fortunes of history of the land to which I have already made a reference, and which resulted in relatively quicker

changes in the socio-political life of the people, generating more social mobility amongst them than anywhere else in India. Such mobility naturally stood in the way of the consolidation of the Brahmanical system of *jāti*. But at the same time the over-all impact, influence and pressure of Brahmanical religion and culture could not evidently be resisted. The carrier of this religion and culture was the Sanskrit language and the Brahmanical priesthood, their pantheon of gods and goddesses, their epics and their *Purāṇas*, their myths and legends, and their entire world of ideas and ideals woven into all these. There is enough evidence to show that this religion and culture had become woven into the texture of the life of the people of the Panjab including those of foreign extraction like those of the Jats, the Hūṇas and Gujars, for example.

The vision and vitality of neo-Brahmanism of the *Purāṇas* which one visualises in the sculptures of Udayagiri, Mahavalipuram, Ellora and Elephanta, for example, seem to have exhausted itself by about the tenth and eleventh centuries, at any rate, in northern India. The missionary zeal and activity and the highly subtle and intellectual philosophy of a Saṅkarāchārya or a Rāmānuja does not seem to have been able to impart to the behavioural aspects of the religion, the kind of sustenance and support that was needed to put new life and vigour into the body social of the people of northern India. By about the second half of the twelfth century behavioural Brahmanism had degenerated into a set of recondite dogmas, limitless proliferation and multiplication of gods and goddesses, meaningless rites and rituals and highly esoteric Tantrik practices not unoften mixed up with the baser instincts of men and women involving sex and induced intoxication. All this was presided over by a privileged priestly class aided and abetted by feudal ruling authorities, both putting the seal of authority on the pattern of living in

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the name of texts and traditions as interpreted by them. Vajrayāna Buddhism, the form Buddhism had come to assume from about the eighth and ninth centuries and in certain areas of the country, was no exception to these general trends and tendencies. The effect of all this on the larger society can well be imagined. There is enough evidence to suggest that almost in all seats of power and authority a general moral degeneracy and social disintegration had become evident. Proliferation of *jātis* by an unending process of permutation and combination involving increasing connubium and commensal taboos and pollution inhibitions, Brahmanical tightening up of socio-religious rigours, increasing feudalization of land and land-tenure, regional rivalries and unbridled exploitation at various levels by those who were in positions of power and authority, have been shattering the social fabric of the land. What the situation in the Panjab was like during these two centuries cannot be ascertained with any amount of clarity and certainty because of lack of enough socio-religious and socio-economic data. But one may reasonably assume that conditions, despite relatively less rigours of *jāti* and less priestly and Brahmanical hold, were not very much different on the whole.

II

When the social situation was such as I have just indicated, the Muslim Turks from across the north-western borders of India chose to strike and to strike with fury and blood. The terrific pressure associated with indiscriminate killing and plunder started with Mahmud of Ghaznā from about the beginning of the eleventh century, and for about a quarter of a century this intrepid killer and plunderer raided and plundered for about a dozen and a half times, a series of

prosperous Indian towns, defeated a number of kings and killed countless thousands of people. Panjab could not escape this fury and pressure. Mahmud left back his governors to rule over the Panjab which they did till Shihab-al Din Ghuri, took over in 1152 A.D., the task begun by Mahmud, and once resumed it was continued until towards the end of the century when the Muslim Turks found themselves firmly established on the throne of Delhi. Establishment and consolidation of an alien political authority, alien in religion which was one of a fiercely proselytizing character, and altogether alien in culture were, understandably enough, associated with bloody wars and conquests, plunder and pillage, pulling down and desecration of places of Brahmanical worship and conversion of countless thousands of Hindus, either by persuasion or by force or through the Hindus seeking to curry favour with and patronage of the alien ruling authorities. The process went on throughout the period of the Delhi Sultanate and later too, during the imperial rule of the Grand Mughals. In-between and in certain areas there certainly were respites in the process, depending on the nature and policy of the particular *sultān* or emperor or their governors and on the exigencies of political or/and economic support and patronage expected or received from the relevant sections or areas of the Hindus.

The immediate effect of the first alien Muslim onslaught and its attendant fury, plunder, bloodshed and conversion, on the Hindu society was one of terrific shock and fear which resulted in a sort of stunning, stupefying torpor of the body, mind and spirit. This seems to have produced a chain reaction to begin with, especially in those regions that were brought under the direct control of the alien Muslim ruling authorities. Panjab came under this particular category.

It is not possible to reconstruct all that must have taken place, but available evidence enables one to formulate certain

highly likely hypothetical assumptions.

First, from evidence available elsewhere in India it seems that the upper levels of the vertically graded Hindu society, especially the Brāhmaṇas withdrew themselves altogether within their shells; the relevant texts say that they adopted the habit of the tortoise (*kūrmā-vṛtti*). For quite some time they continued to maintain an attitude of non-co-operation with the ruling authorities. But in the Panjab itself these upper grades, especially that of the Brāhmaṇas, were not too many in number and their influence could not have been very pervading, perhaps.

Secondly, for a time at any rate, the trading and commercial grades, the *Vāṇiyas* of medieval literature, much less the agriculturists, must have felt disturbed and dislocated since such centres of trade and commerce as Ohind, Sialkot, Nagarkot, Multan and Lahore along with many other centres of northern and central India, lay along the routes of plundering raids and expeditions and had also been more than once raided and plundered before they were actually occupied. But once the ruling authorities could restore some amount of law and order the trading and commercial communities, seem to have regained their own. These communities that is, the *Vāṇiyas* and the agriculturists, also included, at any rate in the Panjab, certain groups of craftsmen who in other areas of Brahmanical society, were generally relegated to the lower orders of society; these were all classed among those who came to be known as *Khatri*s. Parenthetically, one may note that during what is called the Sultanate period was introduced into India a number of new crafts which were perhaps, to begin with, in the hands of Muslim craftsmen but were eventually taken up by the Hindus.² The very lowest crafts and professions which were considered unclean and hence impure from the Brahmanical point of view, were left in the hands of the

lowest orders of the society; often with the untouchables.

Thirdly, as the alien Muslim political and military authority consolidated itself it was increasingly being felt that they could not run the administration of the country without some amount of help and co-operation from the Hindus and without knowing some of their habits and customs, ideas and beliefs, myths and legends, in a word, their pattern of life. Such help and co-operation were not readily available from the Brāhmaṇas and other conscience-keepers of the community. They had therefore, to seek this help and co-operation from amongst the relatively lower orders of the society.

Fourthly, Sanskrit being the official language of the intellectual *élite* and of Brahmanical Hinduism, regional spoken languages and dialects of the common people did have hardly any chance of coming to the fore and making their impact felt, unless it was with a few of the non-Brahmanical protestant and esoteric religious sects and cults like the Sahajayāni and Tāntrik Buddhists, Nātha-panthis, Aghora-panthis, Jains, Avadhūtas, Kāpālikas, etc. but whose influence was limited within the boundaries of the respective sects themselves. Now, since the relatively lower orders of the society were extending their help and co-operation to the ruling authorities and were coming up to the upper levels of the society through more avenues than one, their spoken languages and dialects were also gaining increasing scope and recognition. This was indeed a fairly long period of rapid growth of our regional languages. It was because of this background that one of the tallest leaders of the medieval Sant tradition, Kabir could exclaim: *Saṁskṛt kūpjal, bhashā bahattu nir*: Sanskrit is the water of the closed well; flowing current of water is *bhashā* or the spoken language of the people. In another place he says:

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*Kabirā sāṁskṛt sāṁsār me pāṇḍit kare bākhān/
bhāṣā bhakti dṛḍhavahi niyāra pada nirvāṇa||*

Sanskrit can be followed by the *pandits* alone; *bhakti* can never be deep-rooted without *bhāṣā* nor without *bhāṣā* can one reach *nirvāṇa*.

Fifthly, the mystical obscure and esoteric but protestant and heterodox cults and sects which I have just referred to, had long been lying low and submerged under the pressure of the dominant Brahmanical faiths and ideas, rites and rituals, practices and patterns of behaviour. Now that their grip on the people was somewhat relaxed, if not released altogether, these cults and sects slowly and steadily but eventually came up somewhat on the surface of the life of the society and began to make their impact felt on the common people who were outside of their respective cult and sect clientele. We have both direct and indirect evidence to show that a few of these cults and sects like the Jain *sannyāsīs* and *Nāthapanthī yogis*, the *Avadhūtas* and the *Kāpalikas* were well-known in the Panjab of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and not merely Guru Nānak but a few successive Gurus had contacts with them, either as contenders or as part collaborators in an ideological sense.

Sixthly, even within the bounds of rigorously prescribed and codified and textually sanctioned and sanctified procedures of religious, intellectual and spiritual exercises, there were individuals and groups that smarted under such elaborate codes and prescriptions and felt restless at and unfulfilled by the subtle and complex cerebral activities which they thought had hardly any place in the realm of the spirit. They also experienced grave doubts as to the efficacy of elaborate rites and rituals, penances and austerities, and found themselves lost in the wilderness of countless number of gods and goddesses. Indeed, they considered these as

unnecessary hurdles on the road to the freedom of the human spirit by which they meant direct communion with a personal God and establishment of complete identity with Him. This, they thought, was possible only through complete surrender of one's own self through personal love and devotion, as understood in an emotional and perceptual sense, to the God or the beloved deity of one's heart and mind, as the One and only God, in other words, through *bhakti* as interpreted in medieval Vaishnavism, not as *bhakti* of the earlier tradition of the *Sāndilyasūtra* or of the *Bhagavadgītā*. This Vaishṇava *bhakti* of which the basic religious response was love or *prema*, seems to have originated in the south of India but had spread to the north where its main exponent was Rāmānand, a predecessor of Guru Nānak. In the west another predecessor was Nāmdev, the originator of the Varkari sect of Pandharpur in Maharashtra; in the east its great propounder were Sankaradeva and Chaitanyaadeva, the latter a younger contemporary of the great Guru. Though not a direct disciple of Rāmānand, Kabir, another predecessor of the Guru, seems to have inherited the message of Rāmānand; he made it current and popular in the north as Guru Nānak seems to have done in the Panjab. But between Kabir and Guru Nānak they did something more to which I shall turn in my next lecture when I should be speaking of the social message of the ten Gurus.

And *finally*, one has to take note of another mystical but somewhat protestant religious cult within the confines of Islam but having a very close ideological and spiritual affinity with the Bhakti cult which I have just referred to. This had evolved round the faith which is known in history as Sufism and associated with the mystic Sufi order of saints. Arab and Persian classical Sufism had already been known in India perhaps from about the tenth and eleventh centu-

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ries, but by about the beginning of the fourteenth, classical Sufism had been fully acclimatized in India and had taken a somewhat different form with a great deal of such local colour and meaning as one finds in many a medieval mystic and devotional cult of India. The remarkable similarity between the *Auliya Dervishes* on the one hand and the *Sahajiyā Vaishṇavas* and *Bāuls* on the other, is not something to be loosely set aside.

Besides the Sufis, there were also other mystic and esoteric orders among the Indians Muslims, for instance, the order of one Ghāzi Miyan who was originally known as Sipāh Salar Masud Ghāzi, one of the earliest and most well-known of Indo-Muslim saints, who lived contemporaneously with Sultan Mahmud of Ghaznā. From what we know about him and his order, it is reasonable to assume that the order founded by him followed certain ritualistic practices not very much unlike those of Sahajayāni Buddhists and of other obscure and esoteric sects of India. Presumably because of this reason Sikandar Lodi found it necessary to ban the order which however was revived later. It is on record that Akbar once witnessed *incognito* one of their festivals in which some of these practices were indulged in. There was at least one other similar Muslim order that we know of, and which also followed certain similar practices. This was the order founded by one Shah Madan whose tomb at Nakanpur near Kanpur still exists and draws crowds, Muslims and Hindus, from far and near. Throughout the Panjab and her north-western frontier areas as well as in the Uttar Pradesh one can see even today countless number of tombs and shrines dedicated to Muslim Sufi saints and saints of other esoteric and mystic Muslim orders.³

III

It is against this backdrop of history that one has to view the life and activities of Guru Nānak and his immediate successor, Guru Angad. Indeed, Guru Angad's life and activities are all but coterminous with those of Humāyun while Guru Nānak's with the three Lodis beginning with Bāhlul and closing with Ibrahim and Babur, the first of the Mughals. The social situation which I have been speaking of, continued to be more less the same till the consolidation of the Mughal empire by Ākbar. But then the situation seems to begin to take a turn.

With Ākbar's consolidation of the empire and the initiation and implementation of his policies a change in the social situation seems to have ensued, with far reaching consequences, to my mind. Let me try to explain this change as briefly as I can.

Already towards the end of the Tughluqs the Delhi Sultanate was tottering to a fall. The repeated onslaughts and invasions of the Mongols and Mughals peaked by the fero-cious and bloody invasion of Timūr had all but shattered its fabric and hardly anything but a semblance survived. Like the last flickers of the lamp the Lodis ruled from the throne of Delhi for three short generations and then even that dim light went out; the repeated blows from the hands of Babur and his army were too much for them. These almost continuous invasions associated with plunder and mass killing could not but affect the entire social, political and economic fabric of by far the largest area of northern India from the extreme northwest to the east as far as Bengal, from the south of Kashmir and the foot of the Himalayas to Gujrat, Rajasthan and central India, the area covered by these invasions and conquests, Panjab being one of the worst sufferers. An end to all this suffering came only when Ākbar came to the

throne and consolidated step by step the empire bringing comparative peace and security back to the land.

But by that time one important change, among others, I imagine, seems to have already taken place : throughout the empire a long string of large-scale *zamindārs* and *zamindāries*, with concentration of enough local power and status, had cropped up. It is curious that a considerable number of these *zamindārs* were Hindus (some of whom claimed to be Rajputs) who happened to be zealous guardians and patrons of Brahmanical religions and religious practices. The story of why, how and when the Rajputs spread out from Rajasthan to as far off places as Bihar and Bengal in the east and Gujrat in the west and from the lower Himalaya in the north to the Madhya Pradesh and Orissa in the south and southeast, is very inadequately known. Very little work has been done in this direction. If the Rajput claim of some of these Hindu *zamindārs* has to be given any credence, one may guess that during the general unrest and insecurity of about two hundred years because of periodic raids, plunders, invasions and conquests much of which was directed against the Rajput kings and dynasties, their collaterals, the smaller Rajput chiefs and nobles chose to migrate to areas which were considered relatively safer, and more secure, there to carve out, slowly but eventually, small *zamindāries* of their own. I believe, we have some indications of how the Paramāras, the Chauhāns and Chāndels, for instance, came to settle down in the valleys of the lower western Himalaya. Elsewhere similar was the case, one may imagine. But personally speaking, I find it difficult to believe that the *zamindārs* of Bengal and Bihar, for instance, of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, were of Rajput origin. Not in a few cases such claims were apocryphal, and this for obvious reasons.

Be that as it may, the fact remains that there had

cropped up a considerable number of Hindu *zamindārs* (indeed, they must have been coming up for some time) whom Akbar's administration extended recognition and with whom Akbar came to maintain very good relations, by and large. Yet we know from the writings of contemporary historians that even as late as the days of Muhammad Tughluq there does not seem to have been any well-defined socio-economic institution that can properly be called *zamindāries* in the sense *in which the Mughal administration understood it*. At best there were small local landed proprietors of not very local social and economic consequence, it seems. I am fully conscious of the arguments that may be offered against this hypothesis; but I need not enter into this debate here⁴.

This important socio-economic factor of Hindu *zamindārs and zamindāries*, presumably along with others, seems to have brought about, to my mind, a significant change in the socio-religious life of the Indian people, at any rate of the Hindus, by about the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth century when the Mughal empire was at the peak of its glory. I have said that these Hindu *zamindārs* were zealous guardians and patrons of Brahmanism, and that they had considerable local power and influence. Here then was an opportunity for the Brāhmaṇas and their priestly class and scholastic segments of the upper *jāti* strata of the people to stage a come back. They had been lying in retreat for at least more than two centuries and a half insofar as big and small centres of power were concerned, and now that there were local authorities who were prepared to extend to them support and patronage in lieu of, in a considerable number of cases, validation of their claim to upper caste Hindu affiliation by the Brāhmaṇa priests, they once more began to assert themselves. In Ujjain and Kanauj, Mithila and Navadvip, for instance, the lamps of traditional priestly and scholastic learning must have been kept burning, however, dimly; it is permissible to

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imagine that these lights now became brighter and priestly scholasticism was activated. The sixteenth-seventeenth century was indeed the period of the revival of Sanskritic learning, scholastic exercise and priestly tradition, if one has to go by the evidence of what was happening at Navadvip and Mithila, Varanasi and Vrindavan, for instance. This was also the period when new *Smṛtis* and *Purāṇas* were being written in an attempt towards re-arranging the Brahmanical society after three hundred years of contamination with the alien Muslims.

To cite one instance, I would refer to what happened to the message and movement of Sri Chaitanyaadeva. Here was a message of simple and direct love for and devotion to God and of criticism and protest against priestly socio-religious customs and rituals as well as against the social injustices built into the *jāti* system, a message that had an irresistible appeal for the common man. The message grew up to be a socio-religious movement of great significance. But within fifty years of his death his six principal disciples, all belonging to the upper cadres of the Brahmanical social order and vastly learned in traditional Sanskrit-Brahmanical lore, chose to get together in the quiet cloisters of Vrindavan and impart to the message of their *guru* a purely Brahmanical interpretation in terms of scholastic texts. They did so presumably in an attempt to make it acceptable and respectable to the scholastic interpreters of Brahmanical ideology. The attempt was successful to a very large extent, though in its popular *sahajiyā* version Chaitanya Vaishnavism continued to draw a large number of adherents though mainly from the lower orders of the society and from the social rebels and recluses. But the main social message of that movement was played down or clouded by the six erudite Bengali Vaishṇava Gosvāmis.

I am tempted to place before you two more instances,

just to show what was happening to the social message of the Bhakti movement, one from the heart-land of India, that is, from the Uttar Pradesh, and another from Rajasthan, but both belonging to the Vaishnava *bhakti* tradition and to a period of Mughal imperial consolidation during and after the reign of Akbar. The Bhakti movement, it is well-known, started with a spirit of decided social criticism and protest directed against the essentially *jāti*-ridden and ritualistic Brahmanism of the priests as much as against the barren scholasticism of Brāhmaṇa intellectuals. One can easily see this trend in Rāmānand, Nāmdev and Chaitanya, for instance. The Sant tradition which derived not a little of its ideas and inspiration from the Bhakti movement, came only to sharpen this trend and make their points of criticism and protest more pointed, more direct and decisive. But when one comes to meet such figures as those of Tulsidās and Mīrābāī, for instance, one cannot fail to notice that a decided change in the socio-religious climate had taken place in the mean time. Not only that the points of criticism and protest were blunted and sharp edges rounded off, as in Mīrābāī, but these were altogether replaced in the case of Tulsidās, by a spirit of abject and absolute surrender to established authority, spiritual and temporal. At least this is the impression left on me by the *Rāmcharitmānas* which is certainly a great spiritual document, but as a social document of a given time and space its message is weak and halting, almost an apologia for acceptance of and surrender to the established order.

What I have just said of what happened to the Chaitanya movement, and to Tulsidās and Mīrābāī, would not have been possible, to my mind, if there was not a change in the social climate and in the social situation in the mean time. I would humbly suggest that this change in climate and situation was due, among other things, to the rise of a

new class of Hindu *zamindārs* wielding considerable local power and influence and enjoying the support and patronage of the Mughal court and administration. It was in this class of *zamindārs* that the Brahmanical priestly and scholastic orders sought and found the support and patronage they had presumably been looking for.

Presumably they also seem to have found some inspiration and encouragement from another policy initiated by Akbar and his court. It is well-known to any student of Indian history that Akbar was greatly interested in certain aspects of Hindu Brahmanical philosophy and religion and in its myths and legends as much as he was in certain mystical and esoteric religious cults of both the Hindus and Muslims. He actively patronized translations into Persian not only of the Hindu epics but also a few of the *Purāṇas* and a recondite text like that of the *Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha Rāmāyaṇa*. Akbar is also credited with having initiated and participated at discussions and disputations with scholastic *sādhus* and *pandits* versed in Brahmanical learning.

In modern intellectual terminology Akbar was a liberal, with good, liberal intentions and policies. But liberalism at any age has great limitations and even dangers. Akbar's liberalism seems to have been no exception. By his support and patronage of Hindu Brahmanical *zamindārs* and Rajput kings and chieftains and encouragement of Brahmanical learning, philosophy and religion he indirectly helped Brahmanism and Brahmanical scholasticism to stage a come back and recover their lost position. The process of the kind of social change that had started taking place during the Sultanate of Delhi and was bringing about social changes of far-reaching consequence, was thus halted, if not altogether reversed.

This Brahmanical revival came to stay and slowly but eventually Smārta-Paurāṇik Brahmanism with its *jāti* rigour

and Brahmanical scholasticism came to regain their grip on Hindu society. This grip was once more so universal that nowhere in India except in Sikhism and the Sikh society, was there any sect, cult or group of any description that could initiate or carry on any movement of any dimension with the spirit and objective of social criticism and protest. The *Sahajiyā* *Vaishnava* tradition, the *Sant* tradition, the tradition of the *Auls*, *Bauls* and *Dervishes* etc. continued to survive, more in form than in spirit, but their zeal and fervour had gone out; as a social force they had lost their meaning and potency. Indeed, not before the nineteenth century there was anywhere in India any sign or indication of any more movement of social criticism, protest and reform.

IV

One has to view the lives and activities of the Sikh Gurus from the third Guru, Guru Amar Das to the tenth, Guru Gobind Singh, against the background of this situation, to my mind. From the point of view of their ideological commitment the eight Gurus remained faithful and steadfast to the *Sant* tradition as oriented and interpreted by Guru Nānak. This will be evident not only from the message of Guru Nānak himself and from the citations in the *Ādi Granth* from his *Sant* predecessors like Rāmānand and Nāmdev, for instance, but also from the writings of the later Gurus and the citations by the Gurus from other *Sants* and *Sufis* than those referred to by Guru Nānak himself. But it is significant that while one comes across in this sacred book more than one citation from Jayadeva's *Gita Gobindam*, a piece of poetry which had come to be regarded as a source of religious and spiritual inspiration in the medieval *bhakti* tradition of north-Indian *Vaishnavism*, one does not

find a single citation either from Sri Chaitanya or from Tulsidas or Mirabai. The significance of this positive and negative evidence should not be missed, to my mind. It is in this choice that lies the historical and social significance of Sikhism and the Sikh society. To steer clear of the esoterism and mysticism, of the austerities, self-mortification and the general negativism of such cults and sects as those of the Jain *sannyāsīs*, of the Nathapanthis, Aghorapanthis, Kāpālikas and other kindred sects on the one-hand and of the orders of the emotionally oriented and surcharged Vaishṇavas of the Bhakti movement, surrendering abjectly and absolutely as much to their personal God as to the established social order, was not a very easy task in the context of the time and the space we are speaking of. But this is exactly what the Sikh Gurus seem to have been aiming at, and evidence at our disposal leave no room for doubt that they succeeded to a very great extent in doing so.

Yet at the same time one has to recognize that they do not seem to have been able to escape altogether being affected by the change in the social climate and situation that was taking place in northern India in the mean time, which I have tried to explain a while ago. The process of transformation was slow, but nevertheless detectable, and by the time of the tenth Guru, the cumulative effect was all but clear.

First, Smārta-Paurāṇik Brahmanism had by then made its impact felt, not through the door of the Vaishṇava Bhakti movement in which Vishṇu or Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā had their inevitable roles to play, but through the cults of Siva and Sakti. It is perhaps common knowledge, among knowledgeable people at any rate, that Vaishnavism as interpreted by Vallabhāchārya enjoyed in the late sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries a great popularity in

Rajasthan, in certain areas of the Panjab and in the so-called Panjab Himalaya. But it must be pointed out that this popularity was mostly confined amongst the feudal Hindu kings and chieftains. We have evidence of a number of Vaishnava *māths* in the Panjab and Panjab Himalaya, that were supported and patronized not only by the hill-*rajas* but also by the Mughal emperors, and in at least one case, at a later date, even by *Maharājā* Ranjit Singh. That such patronage was motivated by political considerations as well there can hardly be any doubt about.

The religion of the common people of the Panjab and Panjab Himalaya was not however this Vaishnavism. Their religion seems to have been based on the popular Puranic version of the Sakti cult, so widely known and practised in these regions during the entire medieval period. Very few people pause to consider this social phenomenon, or to consider the significance of such toponyms in these regions as, for instance, Ambala which is derived from Ambā, one of the many names of Durgā, Chandigarh which is named after Chāṇḍī, Pañchkula (a growing village between Kalka and Chandigarh), a technical term of unmistakable Tāntrik significance, Kalka which is a vulgarisation of Kālikā, Simla which is Syāmalā Devī in its anglicised version. A careful and close look at the postal directories of the Panjab, Haryana and Himachal would yield a long list of such toponyms from which one may draw one's own conclusions. Besides, throughout these regions one still finds a countless number of small, lowly shrines with all but shapeless icons of crude form placed on their altars, which worshippers, lowly village folks, describe as Manasā, Chāṇḍī, Kāli, Naynā, Durgā etc. which are all, in one way or other, manifestations of Sakti, the mother goddess *par excellence* of Puranic Brahmanism. This mother goddess in the form of Chāṇḍī and Durgā seems to have entered the imagination of at least the tenth Guru,

Guru Gobind Singh. Critical historical scholarship would not perhaps accept the doubtful evidence of his vision and worship of Durgā, but the fact remains that he composed a *Chandi di Vār* recounting the Puranic stories of Brahmanical gods and goddesses of whom Chandi and Durgā happened to be the core. By itself this piece of evidence would not perhaps constitute an argument in favour of what I have been trying to say, but there is also the fact that he composed a piece on *Chobis Avatar* and another on *Durgā* and that in many of his works included in the *Dasam Granth*, the language happens to be scholastic Hindi with a rich Sanskritic vocabulary and diction. This seems to me to point to the fact that Guru Gobind Singh chose to allow his mental and imaginative faculties to roam in the region of Puranic Brahmanical Hinduism and Brahmanical scholasticism and to employ his high literary and creative talents to make the epic and Puranic myths and legends of *avatāras*, gods and goddesses and heroes popular and well-known once more, at any rate among the Sikhs. There is perhaps no reason to assume that he had personally come to acquire any faith in Chandi or Durgā (we have his positive statements that he was stoutly opposed to any kind of icon worship and to Brahmanical Hinduism), but since such was the social atmosphere he seems to have accepted it as a fact of contemporary life and used it to his advantage. One can easily see that his selection of epic and Puranic myths and legends was limited to those alone that were of a fearless and heroic nature, having a content of heroic struggle against the enemy. Evidently he was aiming at instilling courage and heroism and determination among his people, preparing them to fight against their enemies, the Hindu *rajas* and the Mughal imperial authority.

That a spirit of revivalism was at work cannot, I am afraid, be altogether denied, especially when one remembers

that Guru Gobind Singh was also the great Guru who sent a group of his *sishyas* or Sikhs to Varanasi to acquire the knowledge of Hindu Brahmanical philosophy, the group which on their return became responsible for the creation of a new sect among the Sikhs, that of the Nirmalās who sought to build a philosophical bridge as it were between Sikhism and Brahmanical Hinduism. It is true that orthodox and classical Sikhism does not recognize the *Dasam Granth* or the Nirmalā sect as part of fundamental Sikhism, nor does it recognize Durgā or Chāṇḍi in their scheme and ideology of the faith and its institutions; but one cannot at the same time ignore the social significance of the facts and factors which I have just referred to. Guru Gobind Singh was perhaps articulating not only his personal sensibilities but also the sentiments and convictions of many Hindus who had in the meantime sought their refuge in the faith of the Sikh Gurus.

In any case Guru Gobind Singh's inclination towards Puranic Brahmanical culture and scholasticism is more than manifest in his writings, and this can be explained, it seems, by reference to the revival of Smārta-Paurāṇik Brahmanism that had been taking place since the middle of the sixteenth century. His compositions of more than a couple of pieces on Chāṇḍi and Durgā can further be explained by the fact that the need of the community in his time was indeed *sakti* or power and energy. Mughal imperial persecution and the machinations of the hill-*rajas* were trying to throttle the growth and consolidation of the power of the socio-religious community of the Sikhs. Guru Arjun and Guru Tegh Bahādur had already laid down their lives in their struggle for resistance. Guru Gobind Singh's one aim was to steel the entire community to that degree of hardness, strength and sharpness when the Sikhs should be able to offer the kind of resistance that was called for. He

was a widely travelled man, vastly versed in Brahmanical lore and learning, and there is no reason to assume that he did not know of his another great contemporary Sivaji, the presiding deity of whose life was Bhavāni, another name for Durga or Chāṇḍī. He also knew, instinctively perhaps, that in contemporary Vaishnavism and in its spirit of absolute surrender he could find nothing that could feed his inspiration and imagination. What could was Saktism, and the essence of Saktism was in the conception of Chāṇḍī or Durga. Indeed, it seems to me that the changing social and political situation was slowly but inevitably being driven, insofar as the non-Muslim Indian socio-religious communities were concerned (the Muslim ruling authorities and contemporary Muslim historians saw in the Sikhs nothing more than just another sect of the countless number of sects among the Hindus), towards an imaginative recognition, at any rate, and this too for a specific purpose, as I have indicated already, of the cult of Sakti and of Brahmanical scholasticism, which was perhaps not the emotional or intellectual inclination of Guru Gobind Singh. True, later reform movements turned this tide, fortunately for Sikhism and Sikh society, to my mind, but it can hardly be doubted that for a time, it had a grip on the socio-religious perception of a certain section at least of the leadership of the community. Indeed, this grip lasted longer than is commonly supposed. Until about the third quarter of the nineteenth century the main reading materials of any literate Sikh were the *Sri Guru Granth Sāheb* which was called the *Ponthi*, the *Bhagavadgītā*, the *Purāṇas* and the *Srimadbhāgavat* along with a few other texts of Brahmanical affiliation in the main. More than one later sect of the faith also advocated and practised worship of Brahmanical gods and goddesses and Brahmanical rituals. It was not until the reform movements of the late nineteenth century and early

twentieth that this process was reversed and the original attitudes and approaches restored.

Smārtā-Paurāṇik Brahmanism in both its priestly and popular versions, was never altogether in retreat anywhere in the country, but with the revival of Sanskritic learning and Brahmanical hold on the society Sikh communities in the rural areas at any rate, had to contend with them. For such communities in the villages it was not easy to resist the continuous pressure of the tide of Brahmanism and of day-to-day Brahmanical practices including the so-called *jati* inhibitions and the worship of icons of gods and goddesses. While it can legitimately be argued that Guru Gobind Singh had no faith in the worship of Durga or Chandī or in any other divinity of the Brahmanical pantheon and that he was using them and the myths and legends connected with them, as mere images and symbols just as Guru Nānak did those of Tāntrik yogic practices for aims and purposes of his own, the fact remains, it seems, that over the decades and centuries beginning from the late seventeenth, worship of Brahmanical icons of gods and goddesses and Brahmanical socio-religious practices were entering into the fabric of Sikh socio-religious life, slowly and imperceptively, by the back door as it were. The Nirāṅkāri movement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the Nām-dhāri or the Kukā movement of the second half of the nineteenth century, the Singh Sabha and the Chief Khalsa Dewān movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for instance, were all, in part at any rate, directed against the falling off of the Sikhs from the pristine purity and simplicity of the principles, standards and practices of the faith and towards calling them back to their purer heritage. All available evidence seems to indicate that towards the second half of the eighteenth century the Sikh community had already been invaded not only by

the traditional *jāti* divisions, inhibitions and prejudices but also by the equally traditional sanctity of the Brahmanical priesthood, complex and expensive marriage and death ceremonies, worship of icons of Brahmanical gods and goddesses and all other things that went with them. The classical ethical standards of the community had also suffered erosion to a considerable extent. But for the reform movements I have referred to a while ago, the Sikh community would have perhaps presented a different picture, I am afraid, from what we witness today.

That what I have just said is not a baseless assumption but a social reality in the Sikh rural areas of the Panjab, is provided by a recent village level social survey carried out by a trained and competent social anthropologist who happens to be a Sikh himself, and this in a village inhabited all but exclusively by the Sikhs and situated at a distance of only five miles from Taran Taran, a most early and important centre of Sikhism.⁵ This study has shown that the Sikh villagers there worship not only Muslim *pīrs* and saints as most rural Hindus also do, but also traditional ancestral and village gods and more importantly, icons of Brahmanical gods and goddesses as well of which the most significant are those of the mother-goddesses like Sitalā, Manasā, Jwālāmukhī, Chāndī and Durgā. The epic and Puranic heroes and divinities that are still remembered and respected by the villagers are Rāma and Kṛṣṇā, Draupadī and Hanumāna, Indra, Siva and Pārvatī. Even as late as 1921-22 the Rāmlilā festival used to be performed in the very precincts of the Golden Temple at Taran Taran; it was stopped only when the Akalis took over the management of the *gurdwārā*.

It is curious however that the Hindu *rājās* of the hills were not taken in by this changed attitude of the Guru. They were shrewd and sharp enough to realise what the

Guru was invoking Durgā or Chāṇḍī and the *avatāras* of Kṛṣṇa for, and to know that despite all these the Guru remained the same crusader against Hindu, Smārta-Puranic Brahmanism and its *jāti* system. As a matter of fact, the Hindu *rajas* were sharper and more persistent thorns on the Guru's sides than the Mughals.

Secondly, Guru Nānak had conceived the community of his *sishyas* or Sikhs as forming a *jāti*-less society; indeed, he had expressed himself in no uncertain terms as did many other leaders of the Bhakti and Sant traditions, against the system of *jāti* as known to and practised in Brahmanical Hinduism. To this the expanding community of the Sikhs remained committed, by and large; the fact also remains that the early non-hereditary Gurus were all nominated by their respective predecessors without any regard to their status in the *jāti* system. Brāhmaṇas were hardly ever drawn to Sikhism; the question of their consideration therefore did not arise. The largest number, to begin with, was drawn from the *Khatri* community of agriculturists, tradesmen, artisans and craftsmen. From the time of Guru Rāmdās and the foundation of Amritsar on a piece of land gifted by Ākbar in the midst of fertile lands that had a high concentration of the sturdy Jāt peasants, a conscious and concerted drive was made to draw the Jāts into the fold of the faith. Guru Arjun added strength to this drive, this time centering round Taran Taran, and before Guru Gobind Singh breathed his last, the Jāts had come to form the core and backbone of the Sikh society and of the Sikh army. Indeed, the Jāt peasantry became for the first time conscious of their strength and the main economic prop of the Panjab, which they still are. There is also enough evidence to show that large recruitments were made not only from amongst such artisan communities as weavers, carpenters and masons but also from amongst those who professed and pursued such

callings as those of barbers, washermen, leather workers, sweepers and scavengers, who were considered low in the Brahmanical *jāti* system. Not a few of the recruits were also from those who happened to be Muslims. The *langar* or the community dining system initiated by Guru Nānak himself, but popularised, expanded and strengthened by successive Gurus, and the *pangat* brought down the commensal barriers of Brahmanical Hinduism, and encouraged, even successfully helped to build up a community that was far more homogenous, unified and integrated than the vertically graded and sharply stratified *jāti* Hindus. The *langar-pangat* system was upheld by the system of community singing, community prayer and sharing of common objectives, adversity and suffering, success and failure. But the most practical step was taken by Guru Gobind Singh when he adopted a unique method of initiation which is very well-known, gave a common appellation *Singh* to all the initiated ones, and made them all look alike by giving them the five common symbols : *kēs*, *kāngan*, *kachchha*, *kārā* and *kirpān*.

Yet at the same time one perceives, even detects during the two centuries we are speaking of, a certain consciousness, not articulated but nevertheless recognizable, which ultimately allowed access by the back door somewhat, of a sort of vertically graded system based on birth and hereditary profession, which is so well-known to the Hindu *jāti* system. Even during the days of Guru Gobind Singh the Sikh community seems to have been divided into two broad groups : the *sardār* Sikhs and the *mazhabī* Sikhs, the former including presumably the agriculturists, artisans and craftsmen and the latter of sweepers, scavengers and leather workers. We do not have evidence enough to say what was happening along the arrow line of time, but after more than two hundred and fifty years after the last Guru, when one goes today to, and scans an average Sikh village one finds

what one may characterize as a clear picture of *jāti* hierarchy, not very much unlike what one sees in a so-called Hindu village.⁶ At the top grade of this hierarchy are the *jāgirdārs*, agriculturists and shopkeepers, the last profession being resorted to by Brāhmaṇas even, and the *jāgirdāri* and agriculture being the occupation of predominantly the Jāts and the Kāmbohs. Then there is the middle group consisting of artisans, craftsmen and traders drawn from such communities as the *kumhārs* (traders), *tarkhāns* (carpenters), *sunārs* (goldsmiths), *mehre* (water-carriers) *nai* (barbers), and *cheembā* (washermen), for instance. To the lowest group belong those who are called *mazhabis*, that is, the *chāmārs*, the *rāmdāsiās* and the *sansis*. What is much more important to a historical sociologist than this hierachal system based on birth, is the fact that all these mutually exclusive groups are also endogamous units, by and large, though instances are not rare of men taking wives from lower castes because of the prevalence of the custom of hypergamy, especially amongst the Jāts. We have no reason to suppose that conditions were different during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The logic of why I say this is very simple indeed. The ten Gurus did not enunciate or initiate any change in the productive system of the social organisation, but accepted and adopted the same productive system as that of the Brahmanical *jāti* system in which the socio-religious and socio-economic, that is, the production organisation were intricately and closely interwoven. Once the Sikh society fell into the same production organisation they were also obliged to accept the inexorable operation of the Hindu Brahmanical *jāti* hierarchy. The same thing happened to Buddhism and Buddhist society, to the Indo-Muslim society and to many other protestant and heterodox sects and cults that stood up against the so-called *jāti* system. But

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this point I should be taking care of in some detail in my last lecture.

V

Well-nigh two hundred and fifty years of the life and activities of the ten Gurus witnessed also considerable changes in the political situation of northern India, changes that could not but have effected Panjab and the expanding Sikh society. It is more than well-known that the emergence of Guru Nānak on the stage of Indian history was associated with the disintegration of the Sultanate of Delhi; he indeed seems to have had access to direct reports of, even if he did not witness, a series of events relating to Lodi-Mughal conflict leading to the extinction of the short-lived dynasty of Lodi kings. The *Bābur-vāṇī* verses make it clear that he also witnessed, at least was in close proximity of, the final attack of Bābur on the Lodi army and the devastation that was associated with the establishment of Mughal authority in Delhi. One may or may not accept the tradition of Guru Nānak's meeting with Bābur, or of Humāyūn's association with any of the Sikh Gurus, but there is no doubt that so long as Akbar was on the throne at Agra, Mughal policy of non-interference helped the Sikh Gurus and the Sikh community, both directly and indirectly, to further their socio-religious and socio-economic interests. That it should be so is perfectly understandable when it is remembered that Akbar was himself personally interested in all mystical religions and religious cults, *sādhus* and *sannyāsīs*, men of devotion and spiritual achievement. This explains Akbar's double visit to Goindwal, once to meet Guru Rāmdās and a second time to meet Guru Arjun, and his gift of a tract of land on which was laid the foundation of

the holy city of Amritsar. This policy of Akbar spans the lives and activities of two Gurus and by far the larger part of those of Guru Arjun, that is, the great formative period of Sikhism and Sikh Society. By the time of Jahāngīr's accession to the throne, taking advantage of comparative peace and direct prestige and patronage of the imperial court in the shape and form of more than one imperial visit, the Sikh Gurus could initiate and carry out policies and programmes that not only went to impart to Sikhism a definitive form by providing the faith a dependable body of texts carefully sorted out and codified, but also helped the Sikh community to take a definite shape and form which were quite distinct from the larger Hindu Brahmanical society on the one hand and the expanding Indo-Muslim society on the other. This was also helped further by the patronage which they came to receive from the trading and commercial community, particularly when trade and commerce came back to their own after the establishment and consolidation of Mughal authority. This patronage and support was indeed very important and significant during the formative period of the faith and the society. One may recall the support and patronage which Buddhism and Jainism, indeed all protestant religions in India, received from the trading and commercial communities during the formative period of their evolution and growth.

But then the tide turned, and during the reigns of Jahāngīr, Shāh Jahān and Aurangzeb, Mughal imperial policy, especially the policy of these three monarchs towards the Sikhs in general and the Sikh Gurus in particular, seems to have been definitely hostile and inimical. The details are too well-known to any student of Indian history, and need not therefore be recounted. Guru Arjun and Guru Tegh Bahādur fell victims to the general policy of persecution of the Hindus pursued by Jahāngīr and Aurangzeb respectively,

though it may be contended that in each case there seem to have been specific immediate causes and events that led to the martyrdom of the two Gurus associated with the meanest and cruellest barbarities of the medieval world. All that I have to point out in this connection is that whatever may have been the immediate cause or causes of what is generally called the policy of persecution of the Hindus, there were perhaps political and economic reasons behind the contemporary Mughal imperial policy towards the Sikh Gurus. It is well-known that Guru Amar Dās initiated the institution of *Manjis* and *Piris* towards an efficient organisation of the expanding Sikh society; this was an important administrative step of significant political consequences. Guru Rāmdās who succeeded Guru Amar Dās, before he breathed his last, made the institution of Guru hereditary; this decision had also very important political significance and perhaps had also important political and socio-psychological consequences. By the time Guru Arjun was installed as Guru in full regalia of power and authority and in impressive pomp and splendour, he was declared and accepted by the Sikh community as *Sāchā Pādshāh*, that is, as their true or real ruler, spiritual and temporal, evidently in contra-distinction to the false *Pādshāh* who was sitting on the throne at Delhi and Agra! Guru Arjun also instituted the well-known *Masand* system, a system of administrative organisation of the Sikh society. It brought about the appointment of a class of officials who were charged with the preaching of the faith and looking after the members of the community, but more importantly, to collect the obligatory contribution of one tenth of the income of all members of the socio-religious community, which was originally a voluntary one. At the time of Guru Hargobind the *Masands* besides collecting this revenue meant for the organisation and maintenance of Sikh places of worship and pilgrimage,

were also directed to collect arms and horses for the standing army. That he was determined to build up and was actually doing so by recruiting among others, mercenary Pathans, deserters from the Mughal army, highway men and sometimes even robbers and criminals, is very clear from available evidence. He himself took to arms and used to carry two swords, *miri* and *piri*, one hanging from the right and another from the left, one representing the spiritual and another the temporal authority. He also fortified Amritsar and built the Akal Takht opposite the Har Mandir, dispensing justice and temporal orders from the former and spiritual guidance from the latter, and living all the time like a king with all the trappings of kingship. By the time of Guru Gobind Singh the Sikh community had been all but transformed from a purely religious group to a highly organised body of men and women within a given area, militant in spirit and oriented towards meeting a challenge to their faith and their society, a challenge that came not only from the Mughal emperors and their governors but also from the Hindu *rājās* of the Panjab Himalaya, perhaps more from the latter.

At the back of all this was the economic strength not only of the Gurus but also of the entire community. Guru Nanak was no recluse from family and society; indeed, he enjoined upon himself and his disciples or *sishyas* strict and faithful carrying out of the duties and obligations of a householder. To this injunction the Sikh Gurus remained committed to the end and carried out their temporal duties and obligations to the fullest according to the needs and requirements of their families as much as of the community which they belonged to, and to the organisation of the institutionalized religion of theirs. They saw to it that the coffers of the *Masands* and Sikh centres of worship were kept well-supplied by regular contributions from the Sikhs.

A few of them perhaps even took to trade and commerce, trading in horses, as Guru Arjun used to do, for instance, the income, at least a large part of it, being devoted to the cause of the community and the faith. But more than that. The backbone of the community were the agriculturists and traders, the craftsmen and the artisans, all productive sections of the then Panjab society, and when the Jāts entered the fold in increasingly larger numbers, the community was provided with a very stable and secure agricultural base. A few of the Gurus also extended active patronage and encouragement to trade and commerce as a result of which a strong trading and commercial community had come into existence, able and efficient enough to sustain and support, in part at any rate, the organisation of the expanding community. Interests of trade and commerce were further served by the foundation by the Gurus of a series of towns and cities—Kartarpur, Anandpur, Amritsar and quite a few others, for instance—which became centres not only of Sikh worship, prayer and pilgrimage but also of active trade and commerce.

Thus had grown up a well-organised militant socio-religious organisation, economically all but self-sufficient, provided with a standing army, a series of towns and cities and a *Pādshāh* who was at once the temporal and spiritual ruler of the community. Here was thus clearly a small state within a bigger state, that of the Mughal emperors, a fact clearly spelt out by Guru Gobind Singh more than once. Clash was but inevitable in the circumstance. It started with Guru Arjun and did not end even with the death of Guru Gobind Singh. The later history is well-known and need not be retold therefore. The Sikh community and the faith round which the community revolves, have not only survived the ups and downs of history and the vicissitudes of fortune, but have been able to maintain their identity, to add to

their strength and to invest themselves with an image that demands to this day respect and admiration of countless number of people from far and near. What there was and is in Sikhism and Sikh society that enabled them do so ? I shall try to answer this question in my next lecture.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Ray, Nihar Ranjan, *Maurya and Sunga Art*, 2nd edn. Calcutta, 1965, pp. 36-37, where there is a fuller discussion of the situation.
2. Not adequate work has been done on this theme so as to warrant any firm conclusion. Nevertheless, from direct and circumstantial evidence available to us but more from historical perception, it seems to me that among others the introduction of the following arts and crafts and the technical innovations associated with these, belong to a period ranging from about the eleventh to about the beginning of the fifteenth century : (a) Certain new techniques of weaving, for instance, of carpets and *durries*, especially of chequered patterns and repetitive geometrical designs and colours, and hence presumably new kinds of looms. The occupational *jati* term *jolak* is of non-Indian origin and is adopted all but exclusively by Indian Muslim weavers of northern India, and this fact seems to me to be significant in this connection. (b) Tailoring. The term *darji* and the fact that the *darjis* were all but exclusively Muslims insofar as northern India was concerned, may be noted in this connection. This is not to argue that the craft of sewing of cut pieces of leather, barks and leaves of trees and textiles was not known in pre-Muslim India; indeed it was, and sewing (root : *sivan*) was a Vedic craft. But tailored garments cut to size, pattern and design were certainly of foreign importation, introduced not earlier than when the Sakas, Kushans and the Yavanas had made their appearance in India. Yet it remains doubtful if such garments were used by the Indians themselves; these were not used in any considerable scale at any rate. The extensive use of such garments by at least those who belonged to the upper strata of society, does not seem to pre-date the eleventh century when the Islamised Iranians and Turks must have been coming to this country in considerable numbers. It is significant that amongst the Brahmanical Hindus, the use of sewn and tailored garments in temples and in religious ceremonies, (*pujas* and sacrificial rituals, marriage and death ceremonies, for instance) is forbidden or frowned upon even to this day. (c) Printing of textiles with decorative vegetal, floral and geometric designs, a fact which is made abundantly clear by the murals on the walls and ceilings of the tenth and eleventh century Jain caves at Ellora, west Indian manuscript paintings of the eleventh to the fifteenth

century and the paintings of the Sultanate period of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Evidence is unequivocal that the technique of textile printing was introduced into India not earlier than the eleventh century and this by the Islamised Iranians and Turks. (d) New form and technique of manuscript and mural painting involving among other things the use of gold and Badakshani *lapis lazuli* blue, as seen in the paintings of the west Indian school of the twelfth to the fifteenth and of the Sultanate period from the fourteenth to the early sixteenth century. (e) Manufacture of paper. Introduction of paper into India does not certainly pre-date the twelfth century, presumably from Iran and Central Asia on the one hand and Nepal on the other. But the technique of manufacturing paper locally and its extensive use seem presumably to have been initiated and patronized by the Turkish *sultāns* and their nobles for the first time. The significance of the use of the term *kāgas* for paper and a large number of toponyms in northern India and the Deccan like Kāgzi-pārā, Kāgzi-purā etc. should not be missed in this connection. (f) *Minā* or enamelling work. (g) Manufacture and use of horse-shoes and stirrups. (g) Cutting and processing of certain precious and semi-precious minerals and arabesque and trellis work in stone. (h) New techniques of wheel irrigation, popularly known in India as the Persian wheel. It may have been originally introduced by the Iranians or Turks as early as the eighth-tenth century since more than one pre-Muslim Indian text mention the term *avaghatisa* (also called *ghafī-yantra*), but its extensive use does not seem to pre-date the thirteenth century. (i) Binding of books by the spine and tooling of the leather binding. The term *pustak* (=book) is derived from the old Iranian *post* (=to bind) from which *postāni*, that is, sewing and binding the pages of a book by their spine as distinguished from *granthas* (whence *grantha*), that is, binding the pages of a manuscript by passing the thread or tussle through the horizontal pages of a manuscript. This method of production of a book, the use of leather to cover the binding board and tooling it for writing and decorative designs in gold, seem to have been introduced during this period. (j) New kind of oven or *tandur* for roasting, cooking and making bread, and new methods of cooking. (k) Certain new fruits like *tarmus* (from Tirmiz) and *kharmujā* (from Khirmiz) and the method of their cultivation. (h) New techniques of brick and stone masonry and

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of making *voussoir* or real arches carrying heavy weight and covering high and wide spans. Not that brick and stone masonry was not widely known and practised in pre-Muslim India; indeed it was. So was also real arch-making. But such arches were not meant either to carry heavy weight or to cover very high and wide expanses unless one refers to the pointed real arches of the temples of Pagan in Burma of the eleventh to the fifteenth century. In regard to brick and stone masonry too, an analysis of the Sultanate brick and stone structures of northern India and the Deccan seems to show that the masons followed a somewhat different technique than what was practised in pre-Muslim India. The fact that the *rdj-mistris* or master-masons were mostly Muslims even until very recent times, is significant in this connection, to my mind.

3. I owe these items of information to my young friend, Mr. I.A. Khan, currently a Fellow at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla, substantively a member of the teaching and research staff of the Department of History, Aligarh Muslim University. He also drew my attention to the entry on Ghāzi Miyān in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*.
4. This is not to argue that there were no *samindārs* in India in pre-Ākbar times. Indeed, we know that there were. The *Tārikh-e Hind wā Sind*, otherwise known as *Chāchanāmd*, uses the words *Rānd*, *Rāi* and *Thākur*, all to denote landed intermediaries. *Rāndās* are also mentioned by Minhājus Sirāj, author of the *Tabaqāt-e-Nāsiri*, and Amir Khusrau mentions *samindārs* in his *Aijaz-e-Khusravi*, both denoting the existence of landed intermediaries. Such intermediaries are also mentioned by Barni in his *Tārikh-e-Firozshāhī*, as *Rāo*, *Rāwāt* etc. and *Khot*. *Zamindārs* are also mentioned consistently as intermediaries by Afif, the author of the *Tārikh-e-Firozshāhī*. The existence of *samindārs* before Ākbar is not therefore being doubted. For all that we know they may have been in existence in some name and form or another, even in pre-Turkish times. But at the same time one may question if there was something of the nature of what may be called the institution of *samindārī*. Besides, from all such references as have just been referred to, it seems that these landed interests had hardly anything more than a very limited local influence, and they had not acquired the status and importance of an institution. But in Ākbar's time it is more than clear that these

samindars had come to acquire much greater and wider importance than had been the case hitherto, and that they had grown not only into an institution, but also that a system which one could call a *samindari* system had come to be evolved, and that the system and the institution had become important and powerful props of the Mughal administration.

It is not difficult to imagine that such an important social change could not have taken place overnight and that Akbar did not conceive and bring it about of his own will and volition in a consciously planned manner. The institution and the system must have been in a process of slow and gradual growth even from pre-Turkish times perhaps, but by the time of the Tughluqs and the Lodis the institution seems to have been taking some shape and form. Evidence available on this point is very meagre indeed, but whatever little we have, seems to point to this direction. But as one reaches the stage of consolidation of the Mughal empire under Akbar, one finds the institution and the system in their fully defined shape and form and in the fulness of their power, prestige and influence.

5. Indera P. Singh, "Religion in Daleke, a Sikh Village" in *Journal of Social Research*, IV, 1 and 2, March-September, 1961, pp. 191-219.
6. Indera P. Singh. "Caste in a Sikh village", in *Sikhism and Indian Society*. Transactions Vol. 4. Indian Institute of Advanced study, Simla, 1967. pp. 25-46.

Lecture Two

THE MESSAGE

1

'Nakedness is no path to *moksha* (spiritual freedom); if this should have been the way to salvation, dogs and jackals would have achieved it. If uprooting of hair should have been the way to *mukti*, the thighs and seats of youthful girls would have achieved it long ago. If donning oneself with coloured robes should have brought *mukti*, peacocks would have gained it. If eating of left-overs of food should have led to salvation, horses and elephants would have long ago reached that state of human experience.'

This is a very rough and ready translation of what is called a *dohā*, evidently very sarcastic in tone and spirit, drawn up to put to ridicule the Jain *āchāryas* belonging to the Digambara sect. The composer of the piece was one Sarahapāda, a *Sahajayāni* Tāntric Buddhist of the order known as that of the *Siddhāchāryas*. He belonged to eastern India, to Bengal, for all that we know, and to about the tenth or eleventh century A.D. These *Sahajayāni* Buddhists were fundamentally of *Mahāyāna* persuasion, but they had evolved a distinctive way of life and faith which they called *Sahaja* which roughly means natural, organic. They have left us a body of literature, mainly in the form of short, mystical and somewhat esoteric *dohās* and *slokas*, in a language which may be called proto-Bengali. These songs and *slokas*, at any rate a collection of them, were made known to scholars about half-a-century ago by the late Haraprasad Sastri, and since then they have been added to by subsequent

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discoveries, studied, analysed and written upon by a large number of scholars. This body of literature gives one a glimpse into the ways of life, the faith and religious practices of a number of early medieval sects and cults of eastern and northern India, but more than that, it affords a more or less clear picture of the religious ideas and practices of the Sahajayāni Buddhist Siddhāchāryas or teachers who had achieved *siddhi* or success, meaning release from the bondage of the temporal world.¹

Briefly speaking, these Siddhāchāryas pronounced themselves very sharply against all forms and practices of Vedic and Brahmanical religions; often they held these forms and practices to ridicule. They were also very sharply critical of the Hindu-Brahmanical *yogis* and *sannyāsis* and more often than not sought to ridicule them. In one of his *dohās* Sarahapāda says :

'The Ārya *yogis* smear their bodies with ashes; carry untidy matted locks on their head; light lamps and strike bells sitting in the corners of their dark rooms; with closed eyes and crossed legs they sit still and from time to time scratch their ears, all this to confuse the people.' There is another *dohā* by another Sahajayāni Siddhāchārya, which echoes more or less similar attitudes.

'What purpose will your lighted lamps serve ? What purpose your offerings ? What gains do you expect by the uttering of *mantras*, by making pilgrimages to holy places, or resorting to hermitage cloisters ? Do you think you can achieve *moksha* by taking a purificatory bath ?'

They also ridiculed the worship of gods and goddesses and all kinds of rites and rituals, barren scholasticism and purposeless logic-chopping of Brāhmaṇa intellectuals.

If this was their attitude towards Brahmanical Hinduism, their attitude towards other contemporary non-Brahmanical

protestant religions, was equally critical and derogatory. Referring to the followers of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism they would assert that one does not find release from the bondage of pleasure and suffering by entering into the state of *dhyāna*, or by discoursing on the *sūtras* and *sūtrāntas* or on the niceties of logic. Still more critical were they of the followers of *Vajrayāna* and *Kālachakrayāna*, their ideas, rituals and practices, penances and austerities and their roving mendicancy. Indeed, they articulated themselves not only against the reality of the historical and the supra-historical Buddha but also against the claim of his achievement of *bodhi* or Buddhahood. The seat of *bodhi*, they claimed, was in the human body itself, and it was by the disciplining of the body through *kāya-sādhanā* as prescribed in *Haṭhayoga* that one could reach a blissful state of existence comparable to the one that one experiences in the complete physical union of men and women. The followers of *Vajrayāna*, *Kālachakrayāna* and *Sahajayāna* were all practitioners of *Haṭhayoga* as were perhaps also the *Kāpālikas*, the *Avadhūtas*, the *Aghorapanthīs* and the *Nāthapanthīs*, otherwise known as *Nāthasiddha yogis*. The masters of the first three cults, that is, those who claimed to have become *siddhas*, were all called *Siddhāchāryas*, and we have evidence to show that quite a good many of them owed allegiance to more than one *yāna* or way of life referred to above; indeed they have left us texts, *dohās* and *gitis* that belong to and are claimed by followers of more than one *yāna*. There was not therefore much of a difference between one *yāna* and another; indeed the eighty four *Siddhāchāryas* known to us were all claimed by the followers of all the three *yānas*. Nevertheless the *Sahajayānis* were critical, even derisive of the *Vajrayānis* and the *Kālachakrayānis*; they were also against *mantras* and *chakras*, *dhāranīs* and *mandalas* of both. They recognised nothing except *Sūnyatā*

and *Karuṇā*, the male and the female principle, and the state of *mahāsukha*, the great bliss that is achievable by complete union of the male and female principles through Haṭhayoga.

Much more critical and derisive were they of the Kāpālikas, the Avadhūtas, and the Nāthapanthis. The Sahajayānis were spiritually closest to the Kāpālikas, but the behavioural pattern of the latter was altogether distasteful to the former since the Kāpālikas used to move about naked, decorate their earlobes with rings, smear ashes on their bodies and wear garlands of bone beads round their neck. The Avadhūtas too, like the Kāpālikas, derived their religious and spiritual inspiration from the Siddhachāryas, but since they believed in and practised rigid austerities and all the *dhūtas* and *dhūtangas* of orthodox Buddhism and Jainism, and followed, generally speaking, a negative way of life they too, were looked down upon by the Sahajayānis. The attitude of the latter towards the Nāthapanthis was no better.² These Nāthapanthis were the spiritual descendants of a sect of *yogis* known as Rasa-siddhas, that is, those who believed in inducing themselves with the help of herbal drugs, to a state of existence in which the physical body became capable of transforming itself to a higher material level and from that level to a state of spiritual experience. The Nāthapanthis inherited this faith and this practice from a class of *yogis* who claimed themselves to be Rasa-siddhas. The Sahajayānis did not regard them kindly; indeed they were very critical of them and spoke of them somewhat sarcastically. Says Sarahapāda :

'We are *achintyayogis*; we are therefore not to be understood in rational terms; we do not know what causes birth and death and *samsāra* (the state of existence between the two). Birth and death are one and the same with us; indeed we do not see much of a difference between the two. Let those who are afraid of birth

and death, go after drugs and induced intoxications for transformation of their physical bodies.'

In all these sects and cults that I have been speaking of, there was one thing in common : these were all non-Vedic and non-Brahmanical, and all protestant in spirit and behavioural pattern; they were also highly critical of all kinds of ideas, practices, rites and rituals of Brahmanical Hinduism and of Brahmanical scholasticism. Naturally therefore they all came to recognize and accept that religious and spiritual quest was a matter which was altogether internal to man. One other common denominator that characterized these sects and cults was that their language of communication, howsoever mystical and esoteric it may be, was not Sanskrit which was the language of priestly Brahmanism of the age, but *Prākṛt* or *Apabhraṃṣa* of some sort or other, and the literary form was either that of *dohā* or that of *gīti* or song, a language and a form which presumably had a direct appeal for the common people, at any rate from about the tenth to about the fifteenth century. The *Kāpālikas* and *Nāthayogis*, and perhaps also the *Avadhutas* and *Aghorapanthis*, seem to have been known throughout northern India including the Panjab.

The protestant and non-conformist tradition of the *Sahajayāni* Buddhists did not die out altogether, nor did those of the other cognate cults and sects. Since these were all mystic and esoteric sects and their ideas and practices were all strictly limited within their respective circles of men and women initiated by their respective *gurus*, the process of invasion and eventual consolidation of the Muslim Turks and Afghans does not seem to have affected them to any very considerable extent. They were all very lowly people living and following their respective ways of life in the fringes of the larger Hindu Brahmanical society which being very large and much more dominant, could well afford to

ignore them. But after the political consolidation of the gains of military conquest of the Turko-Afghan Muslims, when Brahmanism and Brahmanical society were obliged to stage a retreat, at any rate for the time being, these lowly and mystical cults seem to have had the chance of their lives and to have come to enjoy a relatively wider popularity than hitherto. But Buddhism had in the meantime lost its place altogether, for more reasons than one, except in its *Sahajayāna* version. Driven underground *Sahajayāna* seems to have impregnated, three centuries later, the cult and sect of the *Sahajiyā* Vaishṇavas who were very popular in Bengal of the fifteenth, sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and gave to Bengali literature its rich genre of medieval Vaishṇava lyrics, the earliest of which is the *Srikṛṣṇakirtan* of Baḍu Chāṇḍīdās. One can indeed detect in this work of *Sahajiyā* Vaishnavism, all the major principles of *Sahajayāna* Buddhism.

Be that as it may, the fact remains that during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries much of the socio-religious life of northern India including that of the Panjab, was surcharged with the spirit and ideas of the non-Brahmanical protestant and non-conformist cults and sects like those of the *Kāpālikas*, *Avadhūtas*, *Aghorapanthīs* and *Nāthapanthī yogis*, perhaps also of the *Sahajayāni* Buddhists. What is called the Sant tradition of medieval north India owes not a little to these older traditions; indeed, the Sant tradition issues directly out of the older tradition, but was conditioned at its conception and birth by two other powerful currents, one of the Bhakti tradition and another, of the Sufi mystics.⁸

But before I turn to a consideration of what I have just said, I would, in parenthesis, say a word or two more about *Sahajayāna* Buddhism and *Sahajiyā* Vaishnavism. It may appear that I have already taken a great deal of time in

giving you a historical background of these two cults and I should not digress any more. But I am doing it on purpose which will be clear as I proceed.

The core in the two words, *Sahajayāna* and *Sahajiyā*, is the word and hence the concept of *sahaja*, one which is very significant in Kabir and Guru Nānak; both use the word and concept again and again just as the *Sahajayānis* did before them, to describe the goal, the ultimate end and purpose of human existence. It is conceived by Guru Nānak in terms of a mystical union of the individual *ātmā* with the *Paramātmā*, the state of the union being described as one of absolute peace and bliss which can in no way be expressed or articulated except in inadequate symbols and vague generalizations. The experience of the mystical union is described by Guru Nānak as one of complete and absolute blending of the two into one, the term being derived from the root verb *sam*, the Panjabi word being *samāṇā* or *samaunā*. The ultimate state is according to him, the fourth state or *chauthā pād* which lies beyond the preceding three states of *tamas*, *rajas* and *sattva*; it is also the *turiya pād* or *avasthā*, or the *param pād*, the state of radiant ineffability that lies beyond the *dañam duār* or the tenth door. That the experience is a mystical one in all its essentials, a sense which is deepened by the use of *anāhad sabad* (unstruck sound), a phrase used to express the experience in a symbolical manner, there cannot be any doubt about.

What Guru Nānak says about *sahaja*, its nature and experience, the words and phrases, symbols and images, phrases and similes he uses in this connection, are all of a piece which is common to Kabir, Dādu and a number of other medieval *sants* who in their turn derived it from the Buddhist *Sidhāchāryas*, especially those of the *Sahajayāna*, since, as I said a while ago, in this entire piece basic is the concept, core is the term *sahaja* which neither Kabir nor Dādu

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and Guru Nanak could avoid or ignore. The Sahajayānis describe *sahaja* experience as *samarasa*, a state of absolute peace and equipoise, without any kind of wave or change; the root is here too, the verb *sam*, be it noted. The character of *sahaja* is beyond any consideration of good or bad, sin or merit, birth and death, and hence waveless; *sahaja* is *Sūnya* and *Nirājan*, that is, it is formless and colourless. The condition of *sahaja* the Sahajayānis express through the symbol of *anahata dhvani* or 'unstruck sound'. How can one achieve this *sahaja* state of experience ? The clear Sahajayāni, as a matter of that, Vajrayāni answer would be as indeed is : by a complete and absolute union of the *niratma* imagined as the female principle and the *bodhicitta* imagined as the male principle, or of *Sūnyata* as the male principle and *Karuṇā* as the female principle, in Brahmanical terminology, of *Prakṛti* and *Purusha*. Logically it followed that in ordinary human and temporal terms the concrete image of such union would be one of *mithuna*, that is, of complete physical union of man and woman. Indeed, this is the image that the Buddhist Siddhāchāryas held up not only in their *dohās* and *giti*s but also in the pantheon of gods and goddesses reared up by the Vajrayānis and Sahajayānis, for instance. The Nāthapanthis did not accept this image of *mithuna*, though they too, thought in terms of a mystical union. But the later Sahajiyā Vaishṇavas did accept not merely the term but also the *mithuna* image, the concept and the practice that went along with it.⁴ That such an image and practice should be very popular among the common people is perfectly understandable and that a sort of crude and libidinous vulgarity would eventually creep into the original conception was but inevitable. This was bound to affect the society at large, and the society in its turn, to affect the cults and the sects themselves and their practices and behavioural pattern. The general degeneration

and eventual disintegration, virtual extinction, so to say, of these cults and sects have been not a little due to the gross abuse of the image of *mithuna* in a most crude and vulgar manner, for which the Sahajayanis seem to have been greatly responsible. The use of the image of physical union of man and woman and of such terms as *mahasukha* to describe the state of consummation of the union, for instance, contributed the most towards this process of disintegration, a fate that befell the Nathpanthis and Sahajiya Vaishnavas as well, at a later date.

II

The theme of this lecture is the social message of the Sikh Gurus, and it is from this point of view that I am trying to understand these cults and sects. Their mystical, psychological and metaphysical import is relevant to my purpose only to the extent of their social relevance. However, it is in the sects and cults that I have been speaking of, that one has to seek the genesis of the Kāpalikas and the Nathpanthis, especially the latter, since both Kabir and Guru Nānak seem to have derived not a little of their inspiration from them. Yet, paradoxically enough, they also seem to have consciously drawn themselves away not only from the Nathpanthis but also from all other cognate and contemporary sects and cults and their socio-religious practices and messages. How were they able to do it ?

There is no doubt that the protestant and non-conformist spirit and attitude towards the system of caste, rigid ritualism and barren scholasticism, worship of countless number of gods and goddesses, meaningless socio-religious customs and practices, etc. of Brahmanical Hinduism, that characterize the teachings of Kabir and Guru Nānak, were

all derived from the older protestant and non-conformist sects and cults as transmitted to them by the Nāthapanthīs in the main. The Nāthapanthī rejection of Sanskrit and of the infallibility of scriptures and their authority were also inherited by both Kabir and Guru Nānak. But the most important thing was their fullest acceptance of the Sahajayāni and Nāthapanthī creed of unitariness of the Ultimate and Absolute as opposed to His 'duality', the concept of duality being resolved or destroyed, according to both Kabir and Guru Nānak, through a mystical union between the individual *ātma* of man and the *Paramātma*. It is highly significant that both Kabir and Guru Nānak adopt the term *sahaj*, I have already pointed out, to describe the experience of this union, a term transmitted to them evidently by the Sahajayāni Buddhists through the Nāthapanthīs. But there ends the debt of both Kabir and Nānak to the Sahajayānis and the Nāthapanthīs.

For the rest Guru Nānak's main source of inspiration appears to have been the strong flowing tradition of the Nirguna Sampradāya, better known as the Sant (*santa=sādhu*) tradition as brought down and made known to him by *sants* like Nāmdev, Kabir and Rabidās, but mainly by Kabir. In the Sant tradition one cannot but fail to notice a strong current of intense devotional love for and a spirit of surrender to the object of love who is no other than the Ultimate and Absolute. Where did the *sants* get this attitude from?

For all that we know *sants* like Kabir, Dādu and Rajjab and a host of the equally sensitive and perceptive *sādhus* in quest of their religious and spiritual aspirations, got it from what has come to be known in India's religious history as the Vaishnava Bhakti movement and perhaps also from the order of Muslim Sufi saints of contemporary Sind, Panjab and Uttar Pradesh. The history, nature and character of

both these movements are too well-known to need recounting. What is important to note is that the Sant tradition is a creative synthesis of the Nāthapanthī tradition on the one hand and the Bhakti and Sufi traditions on the other.⁵

The cardinal principles of this tradition may be set down as follows. *First*, negatively speaking, it rejected altogether the Vaishṇava context of Kṛṣṇa, and his manifestations; it also rejected Rādhā. Indeed, whatever anthropomorphism and temporal and physical associations were integrated with the Vaishṇava tradition were given up altogether. Similarly, it also rejected the Sufi conception of the Beloved in terms of any kind of anthropomorphism and temporal associations. *Secondly*, it rejected altogether the practice of celibacy and asceticism, of penances and austerities, of pilgrimages and formal religious exercises, worship of images and the authority of the so-called sacred texts. *Thirdly*, it accepted the unitariness and the absoluteness of the Ultimate in whichever name one preferred to call Him, but never and in no way in any anthropomorphic form. His manifestations whatever these were, were to be seen and experienced in and through His created objects but significantly through His immanence dwelling in every human individual. If one was fortunate enough to receive His grace and was prepared to go through the spiritual discipline necessary for the purpose, he could experience His revelation within his own self. He could help this revelation to be experienced by and within himself through his devotional love and surrender to Him and by remembering and repeating His name with love and devotion. And *fourthly*, what I said a while ago, it accepted that the 'duality' of the individual self and the universal self which was none other than the absolute Ultimate or God, the *Paramātma* in Guru Nānak's terminology, could be resolved by a complete merger or blending of the two

through the means of a mystical union.

These principles of the north Indian Sant tradition one finds accepted and articulated by *sādhus* like Kabir, Guru Nānak and Dādu. Indeed, in Kabir, for the first time perhaps, one sees a clear picture of the Sant synthesis in its quintessence, which Guru Nānak seem to have inherited, presumably along with others of his times. The inheritance was a rich one, but there ends Guru Nānak's indebtedness to Kabir and the *sants*.

Sikhism, I must point out, is not just Kabirism; it is not just a continuation of the Sant tradition either. Guru Nānak accepted both but oriented and organised them in a manner, imparted to them such a coherence, and what is more, such a social purpose as to enable one to construct a systematised theology from beginning to end, lay down the major lineaments of a religious and spiritual discipline and the step by step process leading to the ultimate goal of an ineffable mystical experience of union with the Absolute and Ultimate. In the process what emerged was something different altogether but not detached from Kabirism and the Sant tradition. The emergence became a distinct entity with a separate identity of its own, which Kabirism could not be; the latter ended up by continuing to remain as a part of the Sant tradition, by far the best part perhaps. This new emergence is what has come to be known as Sikhism.

Both Kabir and Guru Nānak were admittedly mystics, but with a difference. In Kabir the *bhakti* influence remains dominant throughout, with a considerable admixture of the ideas, images and symbols of the Sahajayāni Buddhists and Nāthapanthis on the one hand and of the Sufis on the other. Reading through the *dohās* and *gitis* of Kabir collected in the *Kabir-granthāvali* and in the *Ādi Granth*, the two collections which alone can be considered authentic, one cannot but perceive very clearly that they record the

intensely personal experiences of a very devout and dedicated person with an essentially mystical temperament. Much of what Kabir says remains obscure in meaning unless one is prepared to accept their validity because he says that they are his personal experiences. More often than not his utterances, rationally speaking, are inconsistent, and though one perceives that he was a monotheist (not a monist though he refers to monistic ideas and uses considerable monistic terminology), it is very difficult, if not impossible altogether, to construct a theology out of what he says, or of the discipline that is supposed to lead the novice, stage by stage, towards the ultimate goal of *sahaj* state of experience.

Not so with Guru Nānak. He was also a mystic, but his mysticism was limited to the final goal of *sahaj* experience which at the ultimate analysis was a mystical, ineffable, unanalysable, inexpressible experience. But beginning from his speculations and assertions on the nature of God and nature of man right up to the discipline that leads one to all but the ultimate end, there is nothing that one cannot analyse, nothing that is entirely so personal as to be obscure, nothing that can be pointed out as inconsistent or irrational. Rather and on the contrary, it is relatively easy to construct from all that is recorded in the *Ādi Granth* as having fallen from Guru Nānak's lips, an organised, almost intellectually systematised set of ideas and beliefs, practices and disciplines. In all these there is much that have come from Brahmanical Hinduism beginning from the *Upanishads* to the monotheism of Śaṅkara, from the protestant and non-conformist traditions beginning from the mystical and esoteric Vajrayānis and Sahajayānis to the Nāthapanthis, the *sants* and Vaishṇava *bhaktas*, and from the Sufis. The terminologies he uses, the ideas, images and symbols he utilises are mostly drawn from all these sources, but in the

process he evolves a good many of his own as well.

I need not spell out in any detail what I have just said, since all these have been worked out already in a fairly detailed manner by more scholars than one.* All that I need point out is that whatever he inherited and whatever he borrowed from, he allowed them all to pass through the crucible of his personal experience, actual, imaginative and intellectual, and when these came out of the crucible they had gone through a strange alchemy. The end-product was neither this or that or the other, but an entirely new thing altogether which called for a new label.

III

Since my task is not to draw the outline of the inner lineaments of systematised Sikhism, but to try to find out the social purpose of the faith and the social direction it gave to those whom Guru Nānak addressed his words to, I should try to itemise them one by one, but as briefly as I can. It was to enable me to do this that I had to enter into a long discussion of Guru Nānak's religious inheritances and borrowings and refer to what he did with them and how they were transformed by him.

The fact that he not only gathered together all the floating traditions of his time but also drew unto himself older, greater and more persistent traditions, and further, that he not only organised them all and gave them a systematised form but also put them into a meaningful mould, was by itself an act of great social significance and pregnant with far-reaching consequences. Through his teachings and utterances as recorded in the *Ādi Granth* he was instrumental in leaving a body of texts that authenticated his faith and the way of life prescribed by him. In

the process he also helped to organise a considerable body of people to whom he addressed his words. He gave them after many centuries, a system of ideas, images and symbols and a set of discipline, all in precise and clear terms and in a very coherent and consistent manner. His social purpose was thus clear, and he worked out that purpose efficiently and well. Neither the leaders of the Bhakti movement nor of the Nāthapantha and the Sant synthesis attempted to do what Guru Nānak did, not in any systematic manner at any rate. These leaders seem to have been individuals working out their own problems towards achieving their personal religious and spiritual aims and aspirations. By their personal living, their character and personality and the general humanistic appeal of their liberal message they were able to attract and draw considerable sections of the people around them. There is some evidence to indicate that those who were so attracted came by themselves to form small or large groups devoted to their respective *gurus* and to seek to hold together after their death, sing their songs and follow and preach their message, in a word, to walk along the path laid down by their respective *gurus*. But there is no evidence to suggest that the *gurus* themselves made any conscious attempt to form a distinct community out of their *bhaktas*, organise and systematize what they experienced and preached, for the benefit of their followers, and give their messages and community of followers a continuity. In other words, I do not find any evidence to indicate that any of them ever attempted to institutionalize their faith and followers, which seems to suggest that they had no other social purpose in view than to make better individuals from out of the groups that assembled around them. Their aim seems to have been the individual, not the society in any significant sense.

What I have just said would explain why none of Guru Nānak's predecessors who were successful in laying down *panthas* or ways of religious and spiritual life and drawing followers or *panthis* along those ways, were successful in building up any considerable social group of any significance. Two contemporaries of Guru Nānak, Sri Chaitanya and Sri Saṅkaradeva are perhaps the only leaders who had a social purpose in view, who sought to work out that purpose to a very great extent and to build up distinct communities and give them a continuity. But the Brahmanical interpretation given to Chaitanya's message by the Gosvāmi's of Vrindavan pushed the nascent community back into the wide folds of Brahmanical Hinduism, there to become an inconsequential sect. What happened to Saṅkaradeva's followers, was not very much different either. Guru Nānak succeeded in what he did because he had a clear social purpose in view and adopted ways and means to work the purpose out effectively and well. That he wanted his faith and the discipline he had evolved for the purpose to continue, is proved by the fact that before he died he nominated a *guru* to take his place as his spiritual successor, one who was not his son.

The doctrine of *guru* as interpreted by Guru Nānak has itself a social import which one may not miss. In Indian tradition there are two ways or means by which one can enter into communion with God; the first is directly between the human individual and God through the intermediary of His manifestations in the shape and form of gods and goddesses, and the second, through one's *guru*, the first being known in contemporary parlance as *debhaja*, that is, those who worship God through His images, and the second being known as *gubhaja*, that is, those who worship God through the intermediary of *gurus*. In both cases, one may take the help of *achāryas* or preceptors, but

they are no substitute for *devas* or *gurus*. In all mystical and esoteric religions and religious cults, at any rate in India, we find the *guru* playing a very important and significant role; indeed no religious and spiritual pursuit in these cults and sects seem to be conceivable without a *guru*. In the Buddhist mystical and esoteric orders the *guru* being the possessor and mediator of esoteric knowledge, he occupies a very crucial and hence an exalted position; so he does in the Nāthapanthī tradition. In the Bhakti tradition the *guru* became an object of devotion which is qualitatively not very different from one's devotion to God himself; indeed the *guru*'s words were regarded as the veritable words of God Himself. The Sant tradition added up the *bhakti* tradition with that of the Nāthapanthīs. There is no doubt that Guru Nānak inherited the totality of this tradition, and in his interpretation of the doctrine one finds elements from the entire inheritance. In the first place there are utterances of his which show that the *Guru* was none other than God Himself, a point which is made not only by Guru Nānak but by Guru Arjun and Guru Gobind Singh as well. Whatever may be said of the nine successive *Gurus* in whose case predecessor *Gurus* and their words may be collectively called the *Guru*, one may not have any doubt that in Guru Nānak's case God Himself was the one and only *Guru*. Then there are other utterances of Guru Nānak which indicate that it was not only God Himself but the Voice of God as revealed to a perceptive soul, which was also the *Guru*, an interpretation which was Kabir's as well, it seems. But still there are other utterances of Guru Nānak which would suggest that the *Guru* was to be equated with the Word or the Truth of God.

But whatever the interpretation the fact remains that he wanted to give to these interpretations a socially institutionalised form. Let us see how he did it. *First*, God

is the *Guru* and Guru Nānak had not only heard His Voice but had also listened to and followed His Word which was the Truth. Naturally he could claim to be a *Guru* himself; indeed, guruship had descended on him as God's grace. Here was thus a clear case of spiritual succession. *Secondly*, therefore, he could legitimately select and nominate one to succeed him as *Guru* since he had transmitted to him his voice and word which were but the Voice and Word of God. Thus was guruship given an institutionalised form recognized socially by the community that chose to follow the faith and discipline he had given them, and once the principle was recognised for two or three occasions the institution came to stay, at the first stage by selection and nomination, and in the next, on hereditary principles. That the institution was made hereditary has certainly a socio-political significance insofar as it indicated adoption of the hereditary principle of succession of the temporal institution of kingship. Guru Rāmdās, the fourth Guru, was still only the spiritual king of the Sikh community, but his son Guru Arjun was the *Sāchā Pādshāh*, king spiritual as well as king temporal.

Be that as it may, one thing stands out very clearly. The formal appointment of a successor by Guru Nānak established for at least nine more generations the principle of formal succession, and this in its turn ensured not only the transmission of the words and message of the first Guru but also the cohesion and consolidation of the Sikh community. This was the first step in that direction, the second being the collection and compilation by Guru Arjun, of a body of texts which were designed to have scriptural authority; significantly was it called the Original Book, the *Ādi Granth*. The third step was taken when Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth and last Guru in succession, abolished the institution of a human *Guru* and in its place set up the

Book or the *Ponthi* which was the embodiment of the words and wisdom of all the *Gurus* recognised by the *dishyas* or the Sikhs; he called the Book *Sri Guru Granth Sāheb*; the Book was indeed the *Guru*, the Lord.

Inherent in this story of evolution of the institution in Sikhism and Sikh society there is a logic, a consistency which is often missed. It has been suggested that one of the reasons why Guru Gobind Singh abolished the institution was that he had no son alive when he took this step. Nothing could be more absurd. We have seen that Guru Nānak's basic interpretation of *Guru* was that God alone was the one and only *Guru*, and this interpretation was never laid aside, neither by the first hereditary *Guru*, Guru Arjun, nor by the last, Guru Gobind Singh. On the contrary, both of them re-iterated it in clear and precise terms. Guru Arjun says : "The True *Guru* is *Niranjan*; do not believe that he is in the form of man," and Guru Gobind Singh says, "Know that the Eternal and Incarnate One is my *Guru*." Another interpretation, a derivative one, to my mind, was given to the idea of *guru* by Guru Nānak when he said that the *Guru* was the Voice and Word of God, presumably as perceived, experienced and articulated by those upon whom His grace was supposed to have descended. The *Ādi Granth*, was designed to hold for all times this articulation of the Voice and Word of God in terms of temporal human communication. There was thus a logical inevitability in Guru Gobind Singh's abolition of the institution of personal human *guru* and putting up in its place as *Guru*, the Book and the *Khalsa* or the body corporate of the community, which together were designed to maintain the continuity of the faith and discipline enunciated in the Book.

Guru Nānak had a very clear and precise understanding of what he believed to be the nature of the unregenerate man as much as of the nature of God and the

ultimate spiritual goal of man, the mystical *sahaj* state of being. In the unregenerate character of man there is greed, lust and sensual passion which along with other evil propensities, make man a slave of *maya*. Knowing this all Guru Nānak had nevertheless accepted *sahaj* as the ultimate goal of man. Traditionally this *sahaj* had among the Sahajayāni Buddhists and followers of other cognate contemporary cults, the Sahajiya Vaishṇavas and others, nourished the idea and reared up the image of *mithuna* or sexual union between the male and female principle, as I have already indicated. Whatever may have been the symbolical meaning, it is well-known that it had in the name of religion encouraged promiscuous and unsocial sexual practices in the society leading to social degeneracy throughout northern India. Guru Nānak emphatically denied this image and interpretation of *sahaj*. He also differed from Kabir, not so much in the conception of the mystical state of *sahaj* but in the notion of the pre-conditions leading to that state of being. Kabir is unclear, if not vague and confusing on this point. Not so Guru Nānak; he is very clear and definite that this mystical union had nothing in it that was external to man, that had anything to do with the idea and image of the male and female principles. On the contrary, the mystical union was the union of the duality of the individual self and the universal self, an union decidedly within the discipline and experience of the human individual. Perhaps Guru Nānak inherited this idea of union from the Bhakti tradition, but it is clear that he made the idea precise and unambiguous. By his emphatic rejection of the idea of *mithuna*, that is, the image of sex-union of human male and female as pre-conditions of the experience of *sahaj*, Guru Nānak must be recognised to have performed a great social service, if one remembers how low and degenerate the social moral situation was in northern India almost throughout the

medieval period. At the same time he ensured for the Sikh community a high level of the pattern of sexual behaviour.

In a line with what I have just said, was Guru Nānak's emphatic rejection of all kinds of penances and austerities, but much more of asceticism and celibacy. This attitude he derived from the Sant tradition, without doubt, but here too, he underlined the idea and made it clear and emphatic and more positive. Indeed, positively, he wanted his followers to lead a worldly life, the normal life of a house-holder recognising one's duties and obligations to his parents, wife, children, relative and kinsmen as much as to the larger society to which he belonged, and yet at the same time remaining dutiful and faithful to his faith and its discipline. The social aim and purpose of Guru Nānak is thus very clear; to this aim and purpose the Sikh Gurus remained steadfast to the end. To maintain a harmonised balance between attachment and detachment, between worldliness and other-worldliness, between the temporal and the spiritual, has never been very easy in human society; yet this was the task which Guru Nānak set himself to, and as one goes through the life and activities of the Gurus and the history of Sikh society one feels that they carried out this task admirably and well. The cohesion and solidarity of the community has not been a little due to the attention Guru Nānak, his successors and the community they reared up, paid to the spatio-temporal aspects of human life and society.

Guru Nānak accepted without reserve the Sant tradition of a *jati*-less society rejecting all external authorities in the form of priests, religious texts, images of gods and goddesses etc., all formal rites, rituals and ceremonies, formal religious exercises, ritual bathing, pilgrimages and all the rest that went with these. He also accepted the Sant rejection of many sectarian beliefs and practices of the

Hindus as well as of the Muslims. But much more than just rejection Guru Nānak and his successors again and again held these up to ridicule and criticized them sharply and incisively, and by so doing they were successful in keeping alive throughout an attitude of social criticism and protest. In this connection I feel tempted to refer to Guru Nānak's setting aside of the claim of his son Sri Chānd since he had exhibited ascetic tendencies, and Guru Amar Dās's act of drawing away of the Sikhs from the Udāsīs, a sect founded by Sri Chand. One may also refer to the crusade that Guru Amar Dās waged against the barbarous custom of *sati* and Guru Arjun's campaign in favour of widow re-marriage, to cite only two instances.

Any student of Sikhism and Sikh society cannot fail to notice how the Sikh Gurus, especially Guru Nānak, Guru Arjan and Guru Gobind Singh, were very sensitively awake to and critical of not only the social but also the political abuses and consequent miseries of the people, which is another aspect of their attitude of social criticism and protest. Here I am quoting four short but well-known passages from Guru Nānak which would demonstrate what I am referring to :

- i. "The wealth and sensual beauty which had intoxicated them (the Lodis) became their enemies. To the messengers (of Death) the command was given to strip them of their honour and carry them off. If it seems good to Thee Thou givest glory, and if it pleases Thee Thou givest punishment. Had they paused in time, then would they have received punishment ? But the rulers paid no heed, passing their time instead in revelry, and now that Babur's authority has been established the princes starve" !
- ii. "The Mughals and Pathans fought each other, wielding swords in the battle-field. One side took aim and fired

guns, the other urged on (its) elephants. They whose letters were torn in (God's) court had to die. Hindu, Muslim, Bhaṭṭ and Thākur women (suffered), some having their *burgās* torn from head to toe, others being slain. They whose handsome husbands failed to return home, how did they pass the night, (what grief they must have endured)!"

- iii. "Thousands of *pīrs* tried to stop Mir (Bābur, by means of magic) when they heard of his invasion. Resting places were burnt, rock-like temples (were destroyed), princes were hacked into pieces and trampled in the dust. (In spite of the *pīrs*' efforts) no Mughal was blinded. None of the spells had any effect."
- iv. "Thou didst spare Khurasan and spread fear in Hindusthan, O Creator, (Thou didst this), but to avoid the blame Thou didst send the Mughal as (the messenger of) Death.""

Describing the sack of the city of Lahore by Bābur, Guru Nānak comments ;

"Lahore city poison, violence, a watch and a quarter."

It is true that here one hears the agonised cry of an anguished spirit, intensely inclined spiritually, but at the same time one cannot also ignore the spirit of criticism and protest that informs these passages. There are other passages too, from Guru Nānak which show how sharp was his social consciousness. Here are a few of these:

"Iron age (*Kaliyuga*) is the knife, the kings are butchers. *Dharma* has taken wings and flown away. In the dark night of falsehood the moon of truth has become invisible...".

"The kings are tigers, the headmen are dogs. They go and awaken those sleeping in peace. The servants tear them with their nails, and the curs lick up the blood that they spill..."

"A *Qazi* sits on the seat of justice; he tells his rosary and mutters the name of *Khudā*. Taking bribes he deprives one of his rights. On being questioned he quotes chapter and verse (to justify what he does)."

"The blind subject, devoid of knowledge, satiate the greed of rulers with carrion."⁸

This sharp social consciousness characterised many of the Gurus, especially Guru Arjun and Guru Gobind Singh. Their concern for the lowliest and the lost, the human appeal of their religious aspirations, their regard for honest manual labour for earning one's livelihood and their intense dislike of parasitic existence, their unceasing and prayerful concern for a clean and honest life marked by fearlessness on the one hand and protestant attitude towards all kinds of sham and shibboleth in religion, society and politics on the other marked their *sishyas* out as a community distinct from the two other major communities, the Hindus and the Muslims.

Apart from these qualitative differences arising out of the religious and spiritual character of the faith and its discipline, the Sikh Gurus took consciously a series of steps directed towards marking themselves and their followers out as a community with an identity of their own, clearly distinct from both the Hindus and Muslims. They were critical of both these communities, on more counts than one, and the Gurus from Guru Nānak downwards never felt tired of repeating this fact of their lives times without number by pointing out where they differed. But what is more important to take note of is that in several matters, for instance, in respect of marriage customs and rituals, death rites, pilgrimages etc., they rejected the elaborate priestly customs, rites and rituals of the Brahmanical Hindus and replaced them by much simpler and much less costlier rituals. The process started already with Guru

Nānak and was continued by Guru Amar Dās, Guru Rām Dās, Guru Arjun and Guru Gobind Singh. The Gurus also founded new centres of their faith and its followers, which soon became new centres of worship destined to replace the traditional pilgrimage centres of the Hindus. It is difficult to believe that there was no conscious and deliberate attempt to build up the Sikh community as a distinct and different one from that of the Hindus.

This distinctiveness was heightened by Guru Gobind Singh's enunciation of the process and symbols of initiation to the *Khālsā* or the corporate community of the Sikhs. He enjoined upon each member of the community, that one must not only have the appellation of 'Singh', the lion, but he must also wear the *kes* or unshorn hair and the *kāṅgā* or the comb, the *kirpān*, or the sword and the *kārā* (steel bracelet), and the *kachchhā*, that is, a 'short' to guard the loin and the thigh. These symbols which were presumably designed to make all Sikhs look alike and distinct from the Hindus and Muslims, had also profound symbolical significance. Contemporary research in the sociology of Sikhism and Sikh society, shorn of scholastic niceties, has shown that the two pairs, *kes* and *kāṅgā*, and the *kirpān* and *kārā*, and the fifth 'k' that is, *kachchhā*, contained within them the idea of opposites. What these opposites mean may be stated as follows : the traditional Indian *yogis* and *sannyāsis*, that is, recluses from society, habitually wear on their heads untidy, matted and heavy locks of hair as symbols of their protest against the traditional Hindu social practice of shearing the hair. The Sikhs accepted the protestant spirit inherent in the act of not shearing the hair, but did not accept the principle of negation of society and social duty and obligation in not keeping the hair tidy and clean. They, while accepting the principle of unshearing the hair, therefore, enjoined upon themselves the practice

of keeping the unshorn hair tidy and clean with the help of a comb. The second pair of opposites of *kirpān* and *kārā*, both of steel, stand respectively for power and restraint of power, the former symbolised by the *kirpān* and the latter by a steel bracelet (*kārā*) supposed to check and restrain the use of the sword. The fifth, the *kachchhā* which is a tight 'short' covering the loin and upper thighs stands symbolically in-between unbridled sexual indulgence on the one hand and continence on the other. It has also been suggested that the five 'K's' symbolise the Sikh interpretation of the three traditional *gunas*: *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. Be that as it may, one can hardly doubt the hypothesis that these symbols worn externally, differentiated them socially from the Hindus and the Muslims alike. They also seem to prove that, symbolically speaking, they illustrate the Sikh concern for achieving a harmonised balance between negation and acceptance, between unleashing of power and restraint of power, and between indulgence and abstinence.⁹ This balanced view of life, the Middle Way of the Buddhists, to recall a parallel phenomenon, seems indeed to have been the characteristic social feature of Sikhism and Sikh society.

If conscious and successful efforts were made to make the Sikhs look and act differently from the Hindus no such effort seems to have been made in regard to the Muslims, though the Gurus were equally critical of them and their pattern of socio-religious behaviour in India. Neither the founder Guru nor Guru Arjun or Guru Gobind Singh ever spared the *qāzis* and *mullāhs* for their narrowness and bigotry, the formalism of their religious behaviour and their inhumanity. If the historicity of the *Zāfarnāmā* be not doubted, then it has to be recognised that Guru Gobind Singh did not even spare a mighty emperor like Aurangzeb, and criticized very sharply the emperor's interpretation of Islam

and his pattern of religious behaviour towards the non-Muslims. Indeed, the attitude of social criticism and protest of the Sikh Gurus was directed equally towards the socio-religious behavioural pattern of both the communities.

Yet the fact remains that in Sikhism and Sikh society there is a great deal of Islam and Indo-Muslim way of life. That the Sikhism of the Gurus would have at its core a few of the basic tenets of what is in a blanket manner called Brahmanical Hinduism, in respect of the nature of God and man of the ultimate goal and the discipline leading to it, that its main body of terminology and concepts would come from that source, is understandable since Sikhism grew out of Hinduism itself, *albeit* as a movement of social criticism and protest. But then the locale of the Gurus was the region of the five rivers, the Panjab *par excellence*, and the time well-nigh two centuries and a half of medieval India when the ruling authorities and the social *elite* were Muslims and the official language of the educated *elite* was Persian. Nowhere in northern India was the pressure and impact of these two factors felt and experienced more than in the Panjab and what is today called the Uttar Pradesh, the heartland of the country. It was therefore in the nature of things that the Gurus would know Persian and a few of them at any rate, would know the language very well, so well as to be able to use it creatively with literary grace and sophistication as did Guru Gobind Singh, to cite only one instance. Besides, Islam with its uncompromising monotheism, its democratic pattern of socio-religious behaviour, its rigourously organised and institutionlised church and its aggressive and proselytising character must have also posed a great confrontation to the Indian mind, society and religions, at any rate, to those Indians who were sensitive enough to perceive, knowledgeable enough to see.

Guru Nānak was certainly one of those who belonged

to this category of people, but he was also something more. I am perfectly aware of the fact that there are many amongst us besides scholars and experts, who consider Guru Nānak essentially and all but exclusively as a religious man dedicated to a spiritual quest, marching forward, with his piercing eyes fixed on God. I recognize the large element of truth in this view of the great Guru. But I also recognize a little more. At the essential core Guru Nānak was certainly a man of God, but he was at the same time a total man, a good husband, a good father, a good householder working with his hand to earn his bread, and many other things besides. He was, we have seen, a man of deep and sharp socio-political consciousness, wide awake to what was happening in the world around him, and constantly applying his mind to the facts, situations and problems of the time and place he belonged to. He clearly saw the general degeneracy of the Hindu society and of so-called Hinduism at the popular level; at the same time he also clearly perceived the meaning of the confrontation with Islam and Indo-Muslim society. Out of his inheritance and from what he felt and experienced of the existential reality around him, he formulated his thoughts and ideas, articulated them and sought to concretise them in the shape and form of social action. What emerged out of it all, is well-recognized. But how he responded to the confrontation with Islam and Indo-Muslim society is not so well-known and recognized.

I have already referred to the nature of the impact of Sufism on Guru Nānak's religious thoughts and ideas; recent expertise on Guru Nānak has made out this point exhaustibly and convincingly.¹⁰ Whatever elements of Sufism may have gone into Sikhism was already an integral part of the Bhakti movement and the Sant synthesis. The nature of the response of Guru Nānak and his successors to the confrontation I have been speaking of, cannot therefore

be understood, to my mind, in the context of the elements of Sufism alone, that Guru Nānak and his followers were able to incorporate into the body and spirit of Sikhism. It is to be sought elsewhere.

The *Ādi Granth* opens with the fundamental theological statement of the Sikhs, the *Mūl Mantra*, the root statement, that of the unity of God-head. The very first word of this statement is *Ek*, the One and the Only One. Guru Nānak is not content, it seems, by characterising God as just the only One; to emphasise this Oneness he adds: 'there is no other', a phrase which he is never tired of repeating. His successors too, repeat and reinforce this statement *Ek*. Monotheistic belief was never altogether unknown in certain streams of Hindu-Brahmanical thought, derived mainly from the *Upanishads*; but when Guru Nānak emerged on the Indian scene this tradition had become very weak indeed, almost all but non-existent. Among a few scholastic individuals the idea was played with for scholastic purposes alone, it seems. In the Bhakti tradition but more in the Sant synthesis the creed of Unity and Oneness of God had certainly a decided recognition, but the over-all mysticism of the movements and the equivocality and lack of clarity and precision in the utterances of their leaders tended to cloud this recognition and make it vague and half-hearted. The emphatic and the unequivocal statement that Guru Nānak makes in the *Mūl Mantra*, that God is the One and the only One and that there is no other, is the most direct and significant response of Guru Nānak, apart from his use of certain images and visions from the *Qurān*, to the challenge of the uncompromising monotheism of Islam. Such a challenge could only be met by an equally emphatic and uncompromising statement on the fundamental Unity and Oneness of God to which the successor Gurus remained and the Sikhs do remain absolutely committed to this day.

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Apart from such purely doctrinal matters there are other areas of life as well where Sikhism and Sikh society reflected the impact of the challenge in more ways than one, and this through terms and concepts borrowed from Arabic and Persian, more from Persian than from Arabic. And, who does not know that terms and concepts are the carriers of a society and of the way of life the particular society rears up? Since my present concern is with the Sikh society and not the Sikh religion, I shall refer briefly to those responses to the challenge of Islam, that relate to socio-religious life.

It is well-known that early in the history of Sikhism there were individuals and small groups of Indian Muslims who sought conversion in the faith of the Gurus, and the process though never gained in volume never ceased altogether either. From the days of Guru Hargobind at any rate, the Sikh army had also recruitments from amongst the Muslims; this increased in volume at the time of Guru Gobind Singh. These two facts along with others may have helped the induction into Sikhism and Sikh society, of certain words and phrases, ideas and concepts from Indo-Muslim life and society.

A close study of the Perso-Arabic words in the *Adi Granth* and in the works of Guru Gobind Singh, and more than one such study is available to us,¹¹ shows that even from the time of Guru Nānak a considerable body of terms and concepts were incorporated in Sikhism and Sikh society. Guru Nānak took over from Islam a number of names and attributes of God, like Rahim, Karim, Mihrvan, Bakshind, Parvardigar, etc., and extended to these an importance such as never had been done before by any other Indian religion or religious leader. With him a true Muslim was one who could revive or renovate (*sayqal*) his spirit, and Guru Arjun defined a Muslim whose heart (*dil*) was as soft

as (*mum*) or wax. By the time we come to Guru Gobind Singh who, according to his *Bachitra Nātak*, was blessed by God Himself as His son and messenger on whom had devolved the responsibility of exercising divine authority, the initiative taken by Guru Nānak was carried a great deal further. Like Muhammad Guru Gobind Singh too claimed to be a divine messenger (cf. *nawaza*, *Nawazidan*). Moreover he claimed to be his son, a claim which the Prophet of Islam did never make, but Jesus, the Christ did. In his works one finds any number of ideational words used in the context of different areas of Sikh life and society of his times: kingship, politics and administration; warfare; morality and ethics; appellations describing the nature of Godhead, etc. Since all such countless ideational terms have been listed, studied, analysed, interpreted and classified by more than one competent scholar, and the number of such terms is very large indeed. I would not go into the question any further.¹² All that I would point out is that when Guru Nānak used such ideational words (the number of such words in Guru Nānak's utterances number about a hundred, more or less), he seems to have had two objects in view: first, to inspire and activate his own people who were in a state of social and moral degradation and political subjugation, and second, to take the Muslim oppressors to task by putting them in the wrong according to the principles of their own faith. Guru Gobind Singh carried on the same work in a much more intensive and extensive manner. Some of the attributes he ascribed to God (namely, God as Remitter of Sins, Companion, Friend, Lord of all the Lands etc.) are frankly Quranic. Sikh use of greetings and honorifics, Sikh identification of God, king, Guru and the *Granth* into one unity as Guru Gobind Singh did, his building up of a State within a State etc. are all parts of a piece. That piece is that of the total response of a com-

munity of people to the confrontation with Islam and Indo-Muslim society. Indeed, Sikhism and Sikh society would not have been what they are and have been through the centuries if they had not gone through the dialectic process that any confrontation generates within a given society, its religion and way of life.

A final word and I would close.

I recognise very well that community singing or *kirtan*, *nām simaran* or remembering and repeating the name of God, reading aloud of scriptural texts and explaining them to an audience gathered for the purpose etc. that one finds in Sikhism and Sikh society can easily be traced back to the Bhakti movement and the Sant synthesis; one need not look elsewhere for locating their sources. But let us enter into a *gurdwārā*. The traditional architectural plan and design of a *gurdwārā* are admittedly a result of a creative synthesis of Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim religious architecture of the late medieval period, that is, it is Indo-Muslim in character the inner architectural plan was conditioned by the requirements of congregational worship. Once one crosses the corridor one enters a big hall, square or rectangular, and open on three sides. At the farther end of the hall is a slightly raised platform on which is placed the central object of worship and veneration, the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*. The floor of the hall is bare, that is, without any furniture; so are the high walls on all sides. The raised rectangular platform on which the Book rests, is not however that bare; it is covered with a richly coloured and brocaded or embroidered piece of textile; in the centre of it is a slightly raised but much smaller platform, sometimes wooden, covered again with a rich piece of textile, and on this rests the Book, covered over with another similar piece of textile. Around the rim of the larger platform and along its base candles and incense-sticks burn, and *chamar*-bearers fan their *chāmars*.

Flowers offered in worship lie around. Worshippers gather in the hall, all with their heads covered, offer their worship in bended knees and utter their prayers.¹³ A few of them sit here and there, not very far from the platform and read parts of the Book or recite the *Japji* in mutters. If a congregational prayer or singing or reading is on, worshippers sit squatting on the floor and listen quietly or join in the singing. One can well visualize that this was indeed the arrangement and atmosphere in an ancient Buddhist *chaitya* hall, but then there would be no platform, and no holy Book on the platform either ; instead there would be a small *stūpa* shrine at the farthest end. Besides, at the time which we are speaking of, there were no *chaitya* shrines before the eyes of the Sikhs.

What there was and where one could find the same kind of general arrangement and atmosphere, was the Shia Muslim *Imāmbara*, with a similar platform, a similar Holy Book, the *Qurān*, or a small *Tazia* placed on the platform, and worshippers behaving in more or less similar manner. In a mosque or *masjid* the arrangement and atmosphere would not be very different; only the holy *Qurān* would not be on a raised platform, but on a shelf against the wall. Instead, the raised platform with three steps leading to it, would be meant for the *mufti* to say his prayers and deliver his sermons from.

It is difficult to contend that the *gurdwara*, architecturally speaking, and otherwise too, was not a response to the confrontation with Islam.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Literature on the *Siddhāchāryas*, their way of life and their *dohās* and *stolas*, is indeed quantitatively very large, in Bengali, Hindi, English and other western languages. A few important titles may be noted. Haraprasad Sastri, *Bauddha Gān O Dohā* (Bengali), Calcutta, 1961; Muhammad Sahidullah, *Les Chants Mystiques de Kanha et de Sarahu*, Paris, 1928; N.C. Chaudhuri, *Dākārṇav*, Calcutta, 1935; Sasibhusuan Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults*, Revised edn., Calcutta, 1962; *An Introduction to Tantric Buddhism*, Reprint edn. Calcutta 1958; D.L. Snellgrove, *Hevajra Tantra*, 2 vols. London, 1959; Herbert V. Guenther, *Yuganaddha: or the Tantric view of life*, Banaras, 1952; Dharmavir Bharati, *Siddha-sāhitya*, Allahabad, 1955; Prabodh Chandra Bagchi, *Studies in the Tantras*, Calcutta, 1939; Rahul Samkrityayana, ed. *Dohdkosha* (Hindi), Patna, 1957.
2. Literature on the *Nāthpanthīs* too, and on other allied cults, is considerable, but the following titles may be consulted. Hazari Prasad Dvivedi, *Nāth-samprādāy* (Hindi), Varanasi, 1966; Kalyani Mallik, *Nāthasamprādāyer Itihas, Darsan O Sādhan-pranali* (Bengali), Calcutta, 1950; Mohan Singh, *Gorakhnāth and Medieval Hindu Mysticism*, Lahore, 1937; P. D. Barthwal, *Gorakh-Vāni*, Allahabad, 1942; G.W. Briggs, *Gorakhnāth and the Kanphata yogis*, Calcutta, 1938; Sasibhushan Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults*, Revised edn.. Calcutta. 1962.
3. Literature on the Sant and Bhakti movements is quantitatively much larger than that on the *Siddhācharyas* and the *Nāthpanthīs*. Out of a countless number of titles on the subject the following may be consulted with profit Hazari Prasad Dvivedi. *Kabir* (Hindi), Bombay, 1950; Syamsundar Das, ed *Kabir Granthāvali* (Hindi), Prayag, 1928; the same ed. with introduction by Parasnath Tivari, Prayag 1961; Parasuram Chaturvedi *Uttari Bharat ki Sant-paramārā* (Hindi), Prayag 1951; Prabhakar Machwe, *Hindi aur Marāthī kā Nirgūn Sant-Kāvya* (Hindi) Varanasi, 1962; Rangey Raghava, *Goraknāth aur unkā yug* (Hindi), Delhi, 1963; P.D. Barthwal. *The Nirgūn School of Hindi Poetry*, Banaras, 1936; Kshitimohan Sen, *Dādū* (Bengali), Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan, 1935; *Medieval Mysticism of India*, London 1935; G.H. Westcott, *Kabir and the Kabir Panth*, Cawnpore,

1907; Bhagirath Misra and Rajnarayan Maurya, *Sant Nāmdev ki Hindi Paddvali* (Hindi), Poona. 1964; Mohan Singh, *Kabir-His Biography*, Lahore. 1934.

4. For a fuller discussion of Sahajayāna, Nāthapantha, Kabir, Dādū and Nānak in the context of the term and concept of *sahaja* (*sahaj*) and allied terms and concepts, see Appendix One of this book.
5. McLeod, W.H. *Guru Nānak and the Sikh Religion*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1968, pp. 158-60, 225.
6. In the best and most scholarly manner, by W.H. McLeod, op. cit., pp. 148-226.
7. These three passages are translations by W.H. McLeod, op.cit. pp. 134-35.
8. Translation by Bhai Jodh Singh, "Structure and Character of Sikh Society," in *Sikhism and Indian Society*, Simla, 1967, pp. 42-43.
9. Uberoi, J.P.S., "On Being Unshorn", in *Sikhism and Indian Society*, Simla, 1967, pp. 87-100.
10. McLeod, W.H., op. cit. note 5.
11. The most significant contribution to this particular theme has been made by Mohan Singh. One may refer to his "Arabic-Persian key-words in Sikhism : their origin and meaning", in *Sikhism and Indian Society*, op. cit. pp. 247-59.
12. Ibid, note 11. Also, see in the same publication, Loehlin, C.H., "Guru Gobind Singh and Islam", pp. 109-118.
13. The traditional practice in any Hindu Brahmanical place of worship is to enter bare-headed, that is, without any head-cover. It is only in places of Muslim and Sikh places of worship that one must enter with one's head covered.

Lecture Three

THE MISSION

I

A thin and rough outline of the social mission of the Sikh Gurus and of the Sikh society as it was conceived by Guru Nānak and evolved by the nine successor Gurus, has already emerged, I hope, from what I said in course of the last two lectures. In this, the last one I should be attempting to impart to that outline a certain amount of rounded plasticity and to its contours, some treatment in volume, surface and depth.

It is not difficult to understand that in a traditional medieval rural agricultural society where the productive system was regulated all but exclusively by the social order of the Hindu Brahmanical *jati*, any protestant and non-conformist socio-religious movement to be effective must be able to formulate a social mission in terms which should be simple, so simple as to be easily understood and experienced by the common people. Its appeal had to be direct and immediate and its protest against the established social order, frontal and uncompromising. This is exactly what Guru Nānak seems to have aimed at. He laid down accordingly the main planks of the platform on which the edifice of the Sikh society was to be built. The later Gurus walked on these planks and a few of them—Guru Arjun, Guru Hargobind and Guru Gobind Singh—strengthened them by buttressing and adding new dimensions to them.

The lives and achievements of the Gurus make one thing very clear, which, to my mind, is significant in this connection. In the Bhakti, Sant and Sufi traditions, nothing

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to speak of the earlier mystic cults, literacy and formal education were never given a high premium; in fact the large majority of the leaders and followers of these traditions seems to have been illiterate and uneducated in a formal and secular sense. Whatever learning and wisdom individual *sants* and *sādhus* could achieve, and some of them did reach to a very high level indeed, they acquired through *sādhu-sanga* or association with the *sādhus* and *sants* of learning and wisdom, through the disciplining of the senses and the mind and through personal religious and spiritual exercise. Not so the Sikh Gurus; in fact, they seem to have turned their back against this Sant tradition. Not only were they all literates; they also must have received, at any rate the taller ones of them, some kind or other of formal and secular education. The style and character of their compositions, the philosophical, and ideological contents of their writings and their considerations and activities in regard to secular life leave no room for doubt that besides being men of learning, knowledge and wisdom they were also men who had received a high level of formal and secular education that contemporary society could offer.

One thing followed another. No one would doubt that Guru Nānak was essentially a man of God, dedicated to a religious way of life, to a quest of the human spirit for union with the Absolute Ultimate. Nevertheless his life and message had also a pronounced secular undertone and a direct social appeal, which explains in a very large measure, to my mind, why Sikhism could strike roots very deep and wide as a religion and Sikh society as an organised and effective body politic while Kabirism and Kabirpanthis, for instance, could not, nor could any other off-shoot of the Sant synthesis or as a matter of that, of even the Bhakti movement except the ones initiated by Sri Chaitanya and Sri Saṅkaradeva. Yet, the Sant synthesis and the earlier

esoteric Nāthapanthis and other similar sects, insofar as protestantism and non-conformism in regard to the system of caste, all external forms and practices of religion, scriptural authority, etc. were concerned, were all more or less on the same footing. Indeed, Guru Nānak had, ideologically speaking, very little more to offer except that his criticism was sharper, the positive content of his utterances more precise and his protest more insistent, a character that was consistently maintained by all the successor Gurus. Guru Nānak had also one more thing perhaps to offer, somewhat in common with Kabir, but more clearly, precisely and positively than Kabir. This was in respect of his criticism of and protest against Islam as well, as he saw it in its behaviour pattern in India, and here too, his successors followed his lead actively and faithfully.

But close and careful evaluation of whatever evidence is available to us, makes it clear that it was not the Guru's criticism of and protest against the behaviour pattern of the Indian Muslim ruling authorities and of Muslim priesthood that earned the popularity and charisma which the Gurus came to enjoy, nor was it the stand they took against traditional Brahmanical Hinduism and its *jati* structured society, though both must have contributed towards the consolidation of the Sikh way of life. The more important reason seems to me to be in the wisdom of the Gurus in integrating whatever best there was in the Sant tradition of religious freedom and spiritual quest and of the spirit of social criticism and protest on the one hand and practical acitivity in pure secular areas of life in a time and space bound world, on the other. It was Guru Nānak's insight, his perception of the nature of man and his consideration of temporal compulsions even in the matter of the spirit's quest for the Spaceless and the Eternal, that seemed to have brought about this integration. His successor Gurus, despite occa-

sional lapses which were very rare indeed, remained loyal to this ideal in thought and deed. Guru Har Gobind and much more than him, Guru Gobind Singh have more than once been accused by more than one contemporary writer, of having sacrificed the religious and spiritual aspects of the faith and the discipline to the temporal need of the hour and thus deviating from the great ideal of Guru Nānak for their having transformed a purely pietistic faith and society to a militant and crusading one directed towards temporal ends. I am afraid, I cannot agree with this view. An analysis of Guru Gobind Singh's writings which are considerable, shows very clearly that he was only elaborating in the context of a somewhat different socio-political situation, what Guru Nānak stood for in his own time and space.

But let me explain.

To be able to achieve the integration of temporal and spiritual seems to me to have been the most significant contribution of Guru Nānak to the totality of the Indian way of life of medieval India. Indeed, he seems to have reared up a new image of a socio-religious community given at once to temporal and spiritual pursuits of life. It is true that in certain currents of Indian life and thought as in the Upanishadic, this integrated ideal was sought to be held up with some amount of emphasis. But as one moves on with time one finds that, by and large, in thought as well as in practice, the temporal and the material were set in opposition to the eternal or perennial and the spiritual. Worldly life was considered to be a hindrance, if not positively hostile and antagonistic to a life of the spirit, so much so that the *vānaprastha* or *tapovana* and *sannyāsa* were the twin goals which worldly life was directed to lead to and to aim at. Speculative thought considered the demands of the temporal but rejected them outright, or at the most admitted them on sufferance, or as a reluctant compromise. The *Bhaga-*

vadgītā seems to be the only document of classical India that is somewhat forthright in its acceptance of the demands, duties and obligations of the human individual to the time and space which he belonged to. It asserts the importance of practical acitivity, lays down a philosophy of action, calls it Karmayoga and places it side by side with Bhaktiyoga and Jñānayoga. Indeed, it defines *yoga* as *karmasu kusalam*, efficiency in practical activity, of course with a detached and disinterested mind, and it was to this life of practical action that Śrīkṛṣṇa asked Arjuna to apply himself.

But, by and large, early and medieval Indian life and thought encouraged an attitude of negation of the temporal and the material and considered practical worldly activity as a snare insofar as the life of the spirit was concerned. Religious and spiritual leaders were themselves other-worldly in attitude and outlook; they lived more often than not away from worldly life and they were never tired of repeating that temporal life was inconsistent with religious and spiritual life. When Guru Nānak emerged on the scene of Indian history, the atmospheric background of one who felt irresistibly drawn to a religious and spiritual life, was very much like what I have just said. The leaders of the Bhakti and Sant movements, more of the latter, did not subscribe to this negative view of life; they were even critical of it and denounced the giving up of worldly life and its duties and obligations. But in their actual living and pattern of social behaviour they breathed an air of mystical other-worldliness, somewhat detached from the pulls and pressures of day-to-day life. What little we know of the life, teachings and activities of a *sant* like Kabir goes only to confirm this assumption. The Nātha-panthis, despite their sharp criticism of *sannyāsa*, of penances and austerities, of celibacy, of all external forms and symbols etc. went a step further in rearing up an atmosphere of other-worldliness since they themselves in their day-to-day

life and behaviour pattern, led a very mystical and esoteric way of life and occupied a position not as an integral unit of the society but on its fringes only and somewhat in enforced isolation because of their mystic and esoteric ways of life.

Guru Nānak's genius lay in the fact that he tore himself away from this atmosphere of negation and declared himself positively in favour of worldly life, of acceptance of the duties and obligations of the human individual to the temporal and the material and at the same time of equal acceptance of the duties and obligations of religious discipline and spiritual quest for the Ultimate. After long centuries he gave back to his people of India the idea and ideal of a balanced life.

He did a little more, which is often missed, and yet its significance was great. He enjoined upon himself and on all his *sishyas* or disciples and followers the primary obligation of practical activity in the shape and form of manual labour. Even for those who could afford to live without soiling their hands he seems to have prescribed that amount of manual labour at least, which would enable them justify their daily bread, a compulsory activity which much later, Gandhi-ji came to characterize as 'bread labour'. In a rural agricultural society, this emphasis on manual work as a socio-religious obligation softened class distinctions and encouraged egalitarianism; besides it encouraged an active and positive attitude towards worldly life and its duties and obligations. Indeed, Guru Nānak, by his personal living and his teachings, was upholding the ideal of a *karmayogi*.

Without saying so much in such positive terms Guru Arjun and Guru Hargobind also did the same; the difference lay in the fact that because of changed socio-political situation, their practical activity was taking a new shape

and form, and when Guru Gobind Singh took over, this shape and form came to receive a deepening of colour and contour. When the tenth, the last Guru said :

“For this have I come into the world;
The Lord sent me for the protection of the Truth
(*Dharma*)

That I spread the Truth everywhere,
And defeat and destroy the wicked and the evil-doers.
For this mission have I taken birth,
Let all holy men know this in their inmost minds;
To spread the Truth to uphold holy men,
And to extirpate the wicked root and branch.”¹

he was only echoing the well-known words of Srikrshna in the *Bhagavadgitā*, and repeating the ideal of a *karmayogi* as enunciated in that text but in a somewhat different context. In the context I have been seeking to present it would be almost foolish to suggest that Guru Gobind Singh had given up the faith of the founder Guru and had come to adopt a new way of life altogether. On the contrary, he was only elaborating in the context of his own time and space, what he had imbibed and learnt from the founder Guru and his successors. He must have read the *Bhagavadgitā* or its available commentaries, or had listened to these explained to him, or otherwise he could not have used almost the same words and phrases, not merely the same ideas. But the question remains : would he have accepted them had they not agreed and fallen in a line with what he had inherited from his great Master, Guru Nānak, and from his successors ? Guru Gobind Singh says more than once that he did not innovate anything, did not introduce any new idea other than what was already there before him, handed down to him by Guru Nānak and his successors. In view of his very express and clear statement which one has nothing to offer against, all that one can say is that the

question has to be answered in the affirmative. Guru Gobind Singh, to my mind, only elaborated the idea of practical activity, of *karma*, in the context of his time and space. This accent on an ideology of action integrated with piety, was certainly a great contribution to the general social atmosphere of passivity that marked the medieval period of Indian history, and thus helped to create a new image of a new faith and a new society. This, indeed, was one of the main planks of the mission of Sikhism and Sikh society.

II

By giving positive recognition to the demands, duties and obligations of secular life, in other words, of the temporal world, Guru Nānak also recognised, if not in so many words, by implication at any rate, that human society was the centre of all moral and creative efforts of social men and women. Admittedly the ultimate end of man's religious discipline and spiritual quest was the mystical union of his individual self with the Universal Self; but the discipline that led to such an experience had wide and deep social implications. Guru Nānak described this world as a *dharamsāl*, an abode of righteousness; in other words, he believed in a basic ethical foundation of the social order of a given time and space. This social order that the great Guru was speaking of, was not the social order of either the Hindus or Muslims or of any other socio-religious community. From the tenor of all his utterances on this theme, it is not difficult to perceive that he was referring to the entire human society. His criticism of Brahmanical Hinduism or Islam, of Jainism or of Nāthapanthi *yoga* was not so much directed towards these religions or religious cults as against the behavioural pattern of the followers of the respective

faiths and cults, that is, against their social aspects. When he said, for instance, "This age is a drawn sword, the kings are butchers, goodness hath taken wings and flown; in the dark night of falsehood I see not the moon of Truth anywhere," he was not referring to any particular individual or socio-religious group but to the contemporary social situation around him. Guru Amar Dās made the point very clear when he said : 'When *sādhus* speak about a particular person, the moral is verily for the entire humanity.' Even Guru Gobind Singh who was so much pre-occupied with and so very involved in the immediate problems of his times, did never lose sight of the larger human society, though his words and exhortations were mostly addressed to and directly meant for those who came to owe allegiance to the social order established by Guru Nānak and consolidated by his successors.

To come back to the point that I was trying to make, namely, that the faith of Sikhism and the social order of the Sikh Gurus were based on certain assumptions and aspirations that were basically ethical. These held good not only in regard to one's religious discipline and spiritual quest so as to enable him to be a better individual, but also in that of one's duties and obligations to the society he belonged to. "Truth is higher than anything else", says Guru Nānak, "but higher than Truth is the practice of truth, or character (*sachon aur sab ko upar sach āchār*), and Guru Gobind Singh says, "It is *rehāt* or ethical way of life that is dear to me, and not just being a Sikh (*rehat piyāri mo ko Sikh pyāra nah*)."¹ When he gave the initiation to his first five beloved disciples (*pānj piyārs*) he enjoined upon them a simple code of conduct called *rehāt*, which was handed down from the first initiates to all later ones, from generation to generation. A few illustrious contemporary disciples of the Guru, Bhai Gurdās and Bhai

Nand Lal, for instance, cared to record these down along with their comments and explanations on them. These, as every one knows, are called *Rehātnāmās* and are recognized by all Sikhs as *prāmāṇik vāṇī* or authorised messages.² These messages constitute what one may call the ethical code that is supposed to regulate the life and conduct of a Sikh, indeed of all social men and women. They lay down in clear terms that for religious discipline and spiritual guidance and aspiration one must look up to God, the ten Gurus and the *Ādi Granth*; on this account one need not go either to the four *Vedas* or to the four *Katebas*, namely the *Tora*, the *Old Testament*, the *New Testament* and the *Koran*, the two hemispheres, symbolically speaking, into which the socio-religious world of the ten Gurus was divided. In the socio-religious and ethical code of any society, there is always a series of "do's" and "don'ts", and the Sikh code was no exception. But in this code there was one item which is somewhat uncommon, namely, that one must not break a vow once taken, a promise once made. To this basic religio-spiritual and ethical discipline Guru Gobind Singh seems to have added another, namely, the social imperativeness of developing fearlessness and courage, consciousness of strength and power, and absolute faith in the ultimate victory of the forces of good over those of evil. Frankly and clearly he was seeking to integrate the ideal of ethical purity and spiritual aspiration of the *rishi* of the old Indian tradition with the aims and aspirations of the *kshatriya* of the same tradition. What is important to note here is that the Sikh code is altogether social and secular in its significance and rears up an image and vision of a faith which is deeply involved not only in religio-spiritual matters but equally deeply in matters socio-temporal.

The *Rehātnāmās* of Bhai Dayā Singh and Bhai Chaupā Singh, for instance, which in parenthesis, are recognised as

not so canonical, go on elaborating the basic ethical code of the Sikhs, laying down thereby a complete code of social behaviour of an individual Sikh as much as of the Sikh community. Much of it is directed not only against the system of *jāti* and against the absolute authority of priesthood and sacred texts as in Hinduism and Islam, but also against all external forms, rites and rituals of both Hinduism and Islam. The latter were replaced by a much smaller set of new ones which were very simple, direct and short, without any priest anywhere at any of these. Besides, a Sikh was asked not to steal and indulge in gambling, not to cheat anybody and not to break a promise, but much more importantly, never to run away from his adversary in the battle field. Positively, he was required to contribute regularly a part of his income to the socio-religious community which he belonged to, practise charity in the name of the Guru, and help any body in need and distress in whatever way he was capable of. A most important injunction was that a Sikh must not make any distinction between the rich and the poor; on the contrary he must consider the rich and the poor, the high and the low as absolutely of equal status. For closer integration the Sikh society encouraged connubium not only between Sikhs coming from various Hindu *jātis*, high and low, but also not unoften between Hindu and Muslim converts to the faith of the Gurus.

Here was thus the mission of a unified and integrated society distinct in appearance and behaviour pattern from that of both the Hindus and Muslims. Individual members of this society were supposed to dedicate themselves to the service of God and men. Pure of soul and pure of conduct, free of *samskāras* or sacraments and free of all external formalities of social and religious behaviour, they were also supposed to be fearless and always prepared to fight against

all forces of evil and give up their lives if need be, in pursuance of such causes. He was also supposed to make no distinction between the high and the low, the rich and the poor and to consider every body as brother or comrade in a common cause. Whether an individual Sikh could live up to this ideal or not was immaterial; but that this ideal did build up a social mission of great significance and that countless thousands aspired to live upto it and successfully did so, history has enough evidence to show.

III

The social economy of the Panjab as elsewhere in India was basically rural agricultural, and the individual psyche of the average Panjabi was nourished and fostered by the fields of the village and by what they yielded from season to season in response to the only capital available to a peasant community, namely, hard manual labour put into the land, the seed they managed to save from the previous crop and the manure of cattle-dung and composts made at the backyard of their lowly homesteads. Traditionally there were the six seasons and twelve months, passing through the varying degrees of heat and cold, both reaching their respective burning and biting points. During the summer months there was that enforced idleness at varying degrees, but when the sky darkened, clouds thundered and rains poured, the field once more came back to life and there was life and joy and activity all around. To mark the sowing and reaping and thrashing in the fields, the birth of a calf in the cattle-shed or a child in the family, or to fill up the time in-between all kinds of peasant activities, there were the seasonal festivities, the songs and the dances. There were also a few families of craftsmen and artisans in the

villages; perhaps also a few tradesmen who lived mostly in the towns and communicated between the towns and the villages. But whatever their professions and activities their heart was on land and their main interest, in agriculture, and their life revolved round the village fields and meadows, the cycle of seasons and seasonal festivities, the cattle, and the simple domesticities of their lives. As one reads through the *Ādi Granth* one can indeed reconstruct with the help of the images and symbols, similes and metaphors, words and phrases, the visual image of the manscape and landscape of the Panjab of the first five Gurus. One can also, through the *Bāramāhās*, all but experience the seasons in the lineaments of one's senses, and can reconstruct the outline of social and domestic life, of religious and economic practices, of articles of food and dress and amusement, of means of communication, irrigation etc. and of the various professions. And here and there, one can, if one has a human interest, come across a song or two which speak of the common earthly hopes and aspirations of an average earthy Panjab peasant. There was one Dhanna, a representative of the Panjab peasantry of his times, who says in a prayerful song :

"O God, I, thine afflicted servant, come to Thee ;
Thou arragest the affairs of those who perform Thy
service.

Dāl, flour and *ghī* I beg of Thee
So shall my heart be ever happy;
Shoes and good clothes,
The seven sorts of corn, I beg of Thee.
Milch cows and buffaloes I beg;
A good Turkistāni mare,
And a good wife,
The slave Dhanna beggeth of Thee."³
To this down to earth, earthy, but God-loving simple

Panjab peasant, well-nourished from his childhood by milk and butter-milk, *ghī*, bread made of fresh corn, and fresh vegetables from his fields and gardens Guru Nānak and his successors offered a new message and a new mission, both simple, direct and straight-forward. The message consisted in the recognition and acceptance of one and only one God in place of hundreds of gods and goddesses. He also told them that this God could be reached not through the intermediary of priests but by one's own honest efforts, through love and devotion and through God's grace, but following a rigorous course of discipline. He gave them a prayer and a routine as keys to this disciplined way of life and the life of a householder given to practical acitivity in matters of the world as much as in the matters of the spirit. The mission consisted in rejecting all external forms and practices of religious and spiritual exercises, meaningless rites and rituals, base and degrading social abuses and practices. Positively, it also consisted in the acceptance of the dignity of manual labour, and the social duty of making no distinction between the rich and the poor and of fighting the forces of evil. Here was a simple and straight-forward message and mission easy to understand and worthwhile following in practice and holding up as an ideal.

That this message and mission would in the socio-religious situation that prevailed in northern India during those centuries, increasingly draw more and more people within its folds, is not difficult to understand. That the charisma of personalities like Guru Nānak, Guru Arjun, Guru Hargobind, Guru Tegh Bahādur and Guru Gobind Singh would also attract more and more people around them, especially against the background of systematic persecution of the Hindus by Muslim ruling authorities after the martyrdom of Guru Arjun and Guru Tegh Bahadur, is also easily understandable. But what held these countless number of people

together was neither the message by itself nor the mission by itself, not even by the two operating together. It was, to my mind, the institutionalization of both, and the organization that was build up stage by stage by the Gurus, one after another, an organisation well-knit and efficient enough to engage the loyalty and devotion of thousands of men and women towards effective articulation of the message and the mission and towards translation of both in terms of effective practical action. The leadership and the charisma of the Gurus served only as incentives and gave the necessary inspiration and guidance.

What I have just said is best proved by Guru Gobind Singh's organisation of the *Khālsā* by which he replaced the Guru. It was a significant decision taken by a man of experience, insight and wisdom at a very critical stage not only of Sikhism and Sikh society but also of medieval Indian history and culture. It is well known that the concept and institution of the Guru were all but integral to all early and late medieval protestant and non-conformist socio-religious ideologies and communities, in northern India, at any rate. What was it that prompted and led Guru Gobind Singh to renounce altogether if not the concept itself, the institution at least of the Guru ? In the context of the time and the place this was indeed a very revolutionary step; yet this was the step the great Guru chose to take, and if we have to go by whatever records are available, he took it deliberately and with cool, objective calculatedness.

First, he must have considered that while the guruship of Guru Nānak was derived directly from God, if one has to go by the evidence of Guru Nānak himself, with Guru Aṅgad and his two immediate successors it could not have been so direct and immediate. Indeed, with them the words and message of the Guru as transmitted to them were considered as Guru, guruhood being supposed to have been transmitted

to them through the words and the message and the mission that went with them. Guru Arjun became Guru because of having been the son of Guru Rām Dās and it was from his time that guruhood became hereditary, a principle which, conceptually speaking, was against the very concept of the institution of Guru. Guru Gobind Singh could not but have noticed this violation of the original concept. I have a feeling that even Guru Arjun may have noticed it. When one remembers how and why he compiled the *Ādi Granth* and the immense trouble he took for it, the loyalty and devotion he wanted to be attached to it since it recorded not only the words and the message of the corporeal Gurus including those of himself but what was more important, the words and the voice of God himself as well, as transmitted to Guru Nānak, one can perhaps imagine that he had at the back of his mind the idea of the recognition of the Book itself as the Guru, he himself being the Guru Regent as it were.

Secondly, Guru Gobind Singh may have realized that any hereditary institution, particularly of a socio-religious nature and of an increasingly expanding society, was liable to deteriorate in character and to become authoritarian. There is evidence in the compositions of Guru Gobind Singh himself to show that if not the Gurus themselves who immediately preceded him, their representatives at any rate, the *Masands*, had actually turned authoritarian and used to indulge in corrupt practices that led to the exploitation of the poorer fellow Sikhs.

Guru Gobind Singh chose one particular day, the *Vaisākhi* day of 1699 A.D., dramatically it seems, to effect a revolutionary change in the concept of guruhood and in the organisation of that institution and at the same time of the Sikh society itself. As one recalls what happened on that fateful day at Keshgarh near Anandpur, one is apt to

imagine that the momentous decision was taken on the spur of a moment, somewhat romantically, and carried out in a manner that was intended to bring about a dramatic effect. Far from it, to my mind. Here was a decision which could not have been taken without a great deal of serious thinking over days, weeks and months, without serious heart-searching and without taking into confidence a small handful at least of his most trusted lieutenants. Every step that he took, from the preparation of the background and the first call of sacrifice, to his own initiation at the hands of the *pāñj piyārās* and the final step of the declaration of the *Khālsā* and the *Sri Guru Granth Sāheb* as together replacing the corporeal and hereditary Guru, seems to have been thought out very carefully and worked out systematically.

What Guru Gobind Singh did was, to my mind, the logical culmination of the process that was started by Guru Nānak himself. Guruhood was meant to be selective; but when Guru Rāmdas made it hereditary he brought in a process that contradicted the original principle. Guru Arjun seems to have noticed this contradiction and when he compiled the *Ādi Granth* which came to be regarded, if not explicitly at least by implication, as the spiritual Guru as if it were side by side with the corporeal, temporal Guru he seems to have all but exposed this contradiction. Guru Gobind Singh by taking the final step seems to have completed the process : he abolished altogether the institution of corporeal Guru and installed the Book as the Guru. The organisational and administrative aspects of the institution he chose to vest on a body corporate which he called the *Khālsā*; its mission was to carry out the spiritual and secular message that resided in the Book. It was therefore supposed to consist of only those who were loyal, devoted and dedicated to their mission.

Here was thus a step taken, which was unique in the history of medieval feudal India; in the context of the time and space it was a most democratic step, socially and politically effective. By one stroke of genius it did away with the charismatic leadership of individual Gurus and placed it on a symbol on the one hand and on a body corporate on the other. At the same time it showed to the medieval feudal world of India that power and strength, whether spiritual or temporal, originated from and resided in the people and their symbol, in the people imbued with a sense of mission, in the symbol that was pregnant with meaning and hence significant.

For the Buddhists of old the Buddha, the Dharma and the Saṅgha were the three well-known refuges. The Buddhists did not recognize the reality of the conception of God; His place was therefore taken, figuratively speaking, first by the historical Gautama, the Buddha, but at a later stage, by the conception of Buddhahood. Since he had no difficulty in recognizing God as conceived by Guru Nānak, Guru Gobind Singh accepted the great inheritance of the conception of God, without reserve. The Buddhist concept of Dharma in so far as Guru Gobind Singh was concerned, came to be symbolised by the *Sri Guru Granth Sāheb* since it contained for him and his followers all the main tenets that were supposed, like the Dharma, to guide and regulate the religious and spiritual as well as the secular and temporal life of men and women. And finally, the *Khālsā* can certainly be equated with the Saṅgha of the Buddhists.

Was the Buddhist Trinity—the Buddha, the Dharma and the Saṅgha—ever at the back of the mind of Guru Gobind Singh when he set up the Sikh Trinity : the God, the *Sri Guru Granth Sāheb* and the *Khālsā*? May be, it is an idle speculation, an accidental parallel; may be, not. But the fact remains that what Guru Gobind Singh did, has

been to a very large extent responsible for making Sikhism and Sikh society what it is today. He decided on a mission just as did the founder Guru, and both saw to it that their respective missions were carried out to their logical end. That they achieved what they wanted to, no one would doubt, I am sure.

IV

A while ago I described Guru Gobind Singh's creation of the *Khālsā* as a 'democratic' act. I would plead that I did not use the word in its exclusively political but did so in a general social sense, meaning thereby that the Guru showed through this act a consideration for his followers, the Sikhs, which was somewhat unusual in the medieval feudal situation of India. I also tried to bring out the social significance of one or two items in the ethical code of Sikhism and Sikh society, that enjoined upon every member of the community individually and upon all of them collectively, not to make any distinction between the rich and the poor, the high and the low, between *jāti* and *jāti*, between creed and creed, and to have particular care and consideration for the lowliest and the lost, for the distressed and the dispossessed. To what extent these injunctions were adhered to, respected and practised by individuals and the community at large, it is difficult to measure, but that the intentions of the Gurus and the social ideal of the Sikh society were conceived sincerely, and that besides being merely humanitarian in attitude, these were directed towards a new kind of consideration of the ordinary people, and this in a social sense, I do not find any reason to doubt.

Let me try to explain, why.

I would request you to recall to your mind the importance I tried to make out of the ethical and social injunction of manual labour on the part of every Sikh to enable him earn his daily bread. I would also like to point out in this connection the attitude towards begging (begging is indeed looked down upon in Sikh society) that exists even today amongst the Sikhs and must have been in existence through the centuries. Strange it may sound but nevertheless it is true to say that beggary as a social institution is still unknown and unrecognized among the Sikhs. This kind of attitude towards manual labour and begging considered together (economically and sociologically they go together, I believe), suggests to me at any rate, that the Sikh Gurus had from the outset the vision of a different kind of society, different from what they had known hitherto and different from what they saw before their eyes. It was the vision of a society in which no one should be reduced to a stage when one should be obliged to beg for one's barest needs, and in which one must do some amount of manual labour. This vision presupposed a new conception, a new approach to those who constituted the under-privileged sections of the society, to the people in general whom one calls the common mass, which may at once be a social attitude and a religio-spiritual attitude.

To use a modern economic concept Guru Nānak came from what one calls today, a lower middle class family. In deep humility of spirit he is recorded to have once said :

“I am the lowest amongst the lowly
as low as one can be;
My associates are the lowly.
And with the great I have nothing to do.
For where the lowly are looked after,
There ! There verily is the gift of Thy grace.”⁴

And again he says elsewhere
"My stand is with the lowly.
What have I to do with the rich
and the vainly great."⁵

He was also very much against exploitation of man by man, particularly in the name of religion :

"Look at the mockery of religion :
That the man-eaters are offering
prayers to God after the Muslim fashion
And the butchers are putting on
the sacred thread of Hinduism."⁶

The *Adi Granth* condemns living by exploitation, bribery and corruption, again and again; exploitation for a Sikh, it says, is like eating a dead man's flesh. And Bhai Gurdas is on record to have said that the Gurus pronounced themselves very strongly against exploitation, particularly of the poorer sections of the society. He pointed out that for a Hindu to live by exploitation was like taking beef, for a Muslim it was like taking pork.

From such stray, casual references as these, it is clear that the Sikh Gurus tried to build up a new image of the society of their vision in which earning one's living by hard labour and giving part of one's earning in charity were considered to be the highest virtues, and in which there should be no exploitation of man by man. There is that well-known anecdote about Guru Gobind Singh who feeling thirsty and craving for a glass of water, refused it when offered by a rich prince whose hands were clean and soft and well-kept. But he accepted the drink when it was offered to him by a poor stable boy, saying that "blessed and pure were the hands of a labourer who worked for his living". Guru Gobind Singh was indeed echoing the words of the founder Guru.

But Guru Gobind Singh went further. He says in his *Tankhānāmā* that the spirit of the people was the spirit of God himself and those who caused suffering to the people was bound to incur the wrath of God. People as a collective entity seems clearly to have come to enter into his social consciousness. Indeed, if Bhai Gurdas and the *Rehātnāmā* of Desa Singh are to be believed, the great Guru came to identify himself completely with the Sikh community and to glorify them collectively as his master and his source of strength and inspiration, and individually as his friends and comrades.

Nothing seems to have disturbed him more than to see his people being exploited not only by the ruling authorities, the Muslim and Hindu priests, princes and landlords but also by the *Masands* of the Sikh Gurus themselves. What steps he took to crush the *Masands* and how he abolished the *Masand* institution altogether, is known to any student of the history of Sikhism and Sikh society. But the manner in which he describes the inhumanity of the *Masands* is evidence enough of how Guru Gobind Singh felt for his people and how he reacted to the rapaciousness of the *Masands* who happened to be the representatives of the Gurus, local guardians so to say, of the Sikhs and collector of the contributions of the *sishyas*.

"If any one go to the *Masands*,
they will tell him to bring all his property at once
and give it to them.

If any one serves the *Masands*, they will say :

'Fetch and give us all thine offerings.

Go at once and make a present to us
of whatever property is in thy house.

Think of us night and day

And mention not others even by mistake.

They put oil into their eyes to make people believe
that they are shedding tears.

If they see any of their own worshippers' wealth,
they serve up sacred food
and feed him with it.

If they see him without wealth, they give him nothing
though he beg for it;
they will not even show him their faces.

These beasts plunder men
and never sing the praises of the Supreme being.”⁷

But no document is so telling, so pregnant, with social significance as the one in which Guru Gobind Singh sings the praise and glory of his people in full-throated voice, his love and concern for the common man. This story of the *Dasam Granth* has often been repeated and the relevant passage quoted oftener. Yet it bears repetition, as the testimony of a seventeenth century leader of men in India, to the great power and grace that he thought, originated from and resided in the people, and this at a time when Indian society was essentially feudal and authoritarian and the common people were considered as nothing more than dumb driven cattle.

A prominent *brāhmaṇa*, Kesho Datt, once came to Anandpur to have a meeting with the Guru. Being a *brāhmaṇa* and a man of local eminence he obviously expected special treatment at the hands of the Guru's attendants; this was not perhaps forthcoming, not quite up to his expectations at any rate. Kesho Datt evidently felt angry and cursed his Sikh attendants calling them low caste rabbles who were being given by their Guru better treatment than was meted out to the *brāhmaṇas* and *kshatriyas*. The Guru heard it but seems to have kept his temper in check. Quietly he said: “Please do not blame me for your imagining that I have ignored you; all are equal in my eyes.

I shall send you the bedding and whatever else you need; but please do not say anything against my inspired disciples". And as they appeared before his vision he burst forth to tell the haughty Kesho Datt who these people were :

"All the battles I have fought against tyranny,
I have fought with the devoted backing of these people,
Through them alone have I been able to deserve gifts.
Through their help I have escaped harm;
The love and generosity of the Sikhs
Have enriched my heart and home.
Through their grace I have attained all learning;
Through their help in battle, I have slain my enemies.
I was born to serve them, through them I reached
eminence.

What would I have been without their kind and ready
help ?

There are millions of insignificant people like me.
True service is the service of these people,
I am not inclined to serve others of higher castes.
Charity will bear fruit in this and in the next world
If given to such worthy people as these.
All other sacrifices and charity are profitless.
From head to foot, whatever I call my own.
All I possess or carry, I dedicate to these people."*

Kesho Datt on hearing this, reports Guru Gobind Singh, 'became ablaze with malice and started burning in wrath as dry grass burns in fire.'

Guru Gobind Singh's words were certainly formed by a sharp social consciousness, so rare in those days in India, and one may imagine that his voice at the moment was surcharged with a deep emotion of love and affection for his people.

V

As I opened this short series of lectures I said that the lives and activities of the ten Gurus spanned roughly speaking, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries of the Christian era. Bearing in the mind the total social situation in Hindu and Muslim India during these two centuries and from what I have been trying to put across to you in these lectures, one can, I believe, hazard the statement that Sikhism as a faith represented the most simple, rational and liberal and the most humanistic and secular of all theistic faiths of medieval India, and that the Sikh society was the most organized and homogenous, unified and integrated community in India within a more or less well-defined territorial, linguistic and cultural boundary. The faith and the community had also earned the advantage of a sound economic base having been able to command the support of practically all the productive segments of the then Panjab society : the agriculturists, the artisans and craftsmen and the tradesmen. Desa Singh's *Rehātnāmā* says clearly that a Sikh must live by agriculture in the main, or by trade or craft, or by any other service to the community which he likes most. He must persist in the profession he chooses." However, later in history the community was also able to throw up political leadership over a large area of northern India, for a while, at any rate. For at least well-nigh three centuries and a half the faith and the community could and did draw upon the sense of loyalty, devotion and dedication of countless thousands of people prepared to lay down their lives for the cause of their faith and its social ideals and aspirations.

Yet the fact remained and still remains that the orbit of activities and influence of the faith and the community that grew up round the faith, could not extend beyond,

roughly speaking, the ecological and cultural limits of the land of the five rivers and their fringes, nor could they bring about any decided and effective impact on the larger Hindu or Indo-Muslim society or on the faiths and practices of either. Sikhism and Sikh society, despite direct challenges from the cultural and political forces of Hindu and Muslim and later, of Christian societies, have been able to maintain their identity and integrity, their unity and solidarity, but there they stay contained by other faiths and cultures, mainly Hindu.

A student of historical sociology may at this stage legitimately ask : Why ?

Before I close I shall attempt a purely speculative answer in the form of a hypothesis and leave it at that for the purpose of these lectures.

More than once I have hinted that medieval Indian economy was basically rural agricultural and that Panjab was an integral part of that economy. This economy was sustained by a hierarchical system of land tenure which in the absence of a better Indian term, is usually called 'feudal.' Land was the focal point of all material interests, and there is enough evidence to suggest that whenever there was any stress and strain on the economy, the usual slogan was : "bring more land under cultivation." Even the Mughal emperors did not hesitate to take shelter behind this slogan. There were also, without doubt, other subsidiary sources of social wealth, namely, trade and commerce and arts and crafts. Art and craft produces were mostly for domestic consumption except for works in ivory, certain precious and semi-precious minerals and various kinds of textiles, the latter being exported in large quantities to west and central Asia, which together, it may be presumed, fetched some amount of trade balance to enrich the Indian economy either in the shape of gold and silver or in that of

horses and certain other consumer goods. It was in this trading in horses that Guru Arjun is said to have earned a good amount of fortune. The Khalji and Tughluq *sultāns* and later on, the Mughals seemed to have introduced certain new arts and crafts and also certain technical skills from west and central Asia, which to begin with, were in the hands of Muslim artisans and craftsmen but were eventually adopted and practised by the Hindus as well.

But everything said and done neither arts and crafts nor trade and commerce were of such character and magnitude as to be able to bring about any transformation of, or even any appreciable impact on the basis of the productive system which was agriculture. For one thing, trade and commerce in medieval India was still, in the phraseology of economic sociology, at the purely trade economy level, that is, in the shop-keeper economy level which can hardly be called productive in the proper sense of the term. Indeed, it was so, by and large, till towards the close of the eighteenth century when it was slowly but eventually drawn into the vortex of European mercantile economy. For another, Indian arts and crafts were still at the handicrafts level, that is, dependent all but exclusively on manual skill; indeed, very little mechanical aid was employed to increase the speed and volume of production. The productive system was thus almost at a primary level though the manual skill was of a very high order. Agriculture, therefore, continued to remain as the main prop of the economy, and since sufficient land for a low level subsistence economy was still available, there seems to have been hardly any incentive for mechanical innovation or inventiveness of a kind that could transform the productive system towards quicker and ampler production. Even when chance and history brought such innovations and inventions at our doors medieval Indian society, even at very high levels of power,

knowledge and wisdom, shrank from them and refused to accept and adopt them to its advantage.

I cannot resist the temptation of citing one example, and this relates to Akbar, the greatest, the most knowledgeable and wise and the most liberal emperor that ever sat on the throne of medieval India. His first conquest was Malwa, and second, Gujrat. There at Surat he for the first time set his eyes on a European face. The Portuguese had arrived at Surat with two ship-loads of merchandise and gifts for the emperor. Two Catholic Fathers representing the Portuguese merchants, had come to see him, pay him their respects and make over the gifts as preliminaries to trade negotiations that they had come for. Akbar received them and their courtesies and all the gifts including presumably a copy of the Bible, except two items, one being a mechanical clock and another a printing press.⁹ No comment is necessary, I believe, on this piece of tragic fact from history, except that the fact illustrates the general disinclination of a basically rural agricultural economy towards any kind of mechanical innovation or invention that was not directly concerned with agricultural operations. However, Akbar may have had his own reasons for what he did, which are not difficult to imagine perhaps. But they do not alter the situation, I am afraid.

To get back to the point I was trying to make.

Agriculture being the main prop of Indian social economy and hence land the main focal interest for centuries past, early Indian society built up slowly and steadily a social organisation in which all social and economic professions and occupations, from priesthood, intellectual and scholastic pursuits, kingship and military vocations to leather tanning and scavenging, were arranged in a vertically stratified hierarchical order based on birth and biological heredity. This order being *jati*, known today to English-knowing

people as 'caste' (wrongly, to my mind), revolved primarily round land and agriculture and only secondarily, round trade and commerce and arts and crafts. *Jāti* was thus not merely a socio-religious system but also a system of production and hence an economic system ; indeed, it was a very complex system into which was woven a pattern of social, religious and economic relationships in a vertically graded hierarchical order based on birth, as I said before. The *jāti* system thus regulated and conditioned the economic order of the society as well, a factor which is often missed by historians and sociologists.

We have seen that the main economic prop of Sikhism and Sikh society was, as in Hinduism and Hindu society as well as in Indo-Muslim society, land and agriculture, the secondary prop being trade and commerce and certain arts and crafts. This means that the Sikh society fell into the general economic pattern of medieval Indian social economy just as the Buddhists and Jains and many other protestant and non-conformist groups and societies, even the Indian Muslims had done before them. All of them including the Sikh Gurus and their followers attacked the citadel of the *jāti* system and its socio-religious patterns of behaviour, criticized and protested against some of the basic tenets even, of Brahmanical Hinduism and aimed their blows from all sides at its body social, but hardly anything could be of much avail in the long run. Hindu-Brahmanical society seemed to have survived all such criticism, protest and attack since it had a firm grip on the productive system of the total social economy. This productive system was never attempted to be disturbed and transformed, not even questioned with any amount of seriousness.

On the other hand, once a protestant and non-conformist socio-religious group, community or society fell into the *jāti* productive system of the Hindus, despite its criticism of

and protestations, attacks and vilifications against Hinduism and Hindu society, it had to admit within itself certain basic elements of the *jāti*-structured Hindu society : vertical social grades, certain socio-religious beliefs and practices even, for instance. This happened to the Buddhist and Jain societies, to the Indo-Muslim society even. No wonder therefore that the Sikh society too, could not escape the inexorable laws of social economy of the given time and space.

One hopes and prays that with the beginning of a new economic system based on a new productive method, namely, mechanical industry and technology including mechanisation of agriculture in which the Sikh peasantry of the Panjab have today taken a lead, will usher a new age for Sikhism and Sikh society, as a matter of that, for the humanity that is India of which the Panjab and the Sikhs are significant segments.

As a student of history I have reasons, I believe, to entertain such a hope. Recent field studies in the sociology of the Panjab and what little we know of the social and economic history of the land of the five rivers during the medieval period, are increasingly making it clear that the Panjab has always been in the forefront in the adoption and adaptation of technological innovations and using these towards furtherance of their social and economic objectives. The relatively more extensive use of the so-called Persian Wheel for purposes of irrigation and of the layer upon layer of *Chakki* stones for grinding wheat flour are only two instances in point. What these two innovations meant in terms of speed and volume in a medieval agricultural economy, may well be imagined. I do not think I should be very wrong if I say that medieval Panjab was in the possession of a technological consciousness the like of which is not to be found in any other region of medieval India.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Translation quoted by Gurbachan Singh Talib, "Evolution of the Heroic character", in *Sikhism and Indian Society*, p. 50.
2. Trilochan Singh, "Social philosophy of Guru Gobind Singh", in *Sikhism and Indian Society*, pp. 195-198.
3. Translation by Macauliffe. W.H. *The Sikh Religion*, vol. VI.
4. Quoted by G.S. Chhabra in *The Advanced Study in the history of the Panjab*, vol I, p. 113.
5. *Ibid*, p. 112.
6. *Ibid*, p. 111.
7. Quoted in Indubhushan Banerjee, *The Evolution of the Khalsa*, vol. II. p. 110.
8. Quoted in Trilochan Singh, "Social philosophy of Guru Gobind Singh", in *Sikhism and Indian Society*, op. cit. p. 199.
9. I owe this important piece of information to my esteemed friend, Professor S. Nurul Hasan of Aligarh Muslim University.

APPENDIX ONE

THE CONCEPT OF SAHAJ IN GURU NĀNAK'S THEOLOGY AND ITS ANTECEDENTS*

I

All knowledgeable Sikhs and students of Sikhism recognize that the ultimate goal which the religious and spiritual discipline laid down by Guru Nānak was supposed to lead to, was the experience of *Sahaj*. *Sahaj*, according to him, was indeed the last reach of human experience, beyond which lay the realm of formlessness, of inarticulation.

What is this *Sahaj* experience, what is its nature and character? How does one achieve it, how does one recognize it?

In common with Kabir and many other *sants* of medieval India, Guru Nānak came to recognize and accept that religious and spiritual quest was a matter which was altogether internal to man. Negatively speaking, it was not a matter of external practices and observances of traditional forms and prescriptions of religion. Positively, it was a matter, first, of cleansing and purifying one's heart and mind; secondly, of filling them with an intense love for and devotion to God, the Ultimate and the Absolute, and waiting cravingly for His grace (*kirpā*, *prasād*, *daid* etc.), and thirdly, striving unceasingly for a complete, unalloyed and absolute blending of one's individual self or *ātma* with the Universal Self or *Paramātma*¹ who is none other than

*Presented at the International Seminar on Guru Nānak and his Teachings, held at the Punjabi University, Patiala, on September 3-5, 1969, to commemorate the quincentenary of the birth of the Guru.

God Himself. For each one of these stages Guru Nanak laid down certain disciplines which each individual aspirant was called upon to go through to prepare himself for the final merger or blending. An analysis of these disciplines seems to indicate that what Guru Nānak was aiming at was a transformation of the individual psyche and will by bending and directing both towards the ultimate goal of achieving the merger with the Ultimate Absolute. It was only when the soil of life was made ready that the final ascent could be made. This ascent too, was in several *khangs* or stages in spiritual progress, as Guru Nānak described them; they were five in number, namely, Dharam Khāṇḍ, Gian Khāṇḍ, Saram Khāṇḍ, Karam Khāṇḍ and Sach Khāṇḍ.² For the purpose of this essay it is not necessary to go into an explanation and analysis of these *khangs*; it would be enough to indicate that neither God's grace nor the merger or blending with Him was any matter of accident, happening as if in a sudden flash. To reach upto the ultimate state of *Sahaj* or absolute union, merger or blending, one had to prepare himself through a rigorous process of *sādhana* or discipline and proceed stage by stage.

How does one recognize that one has reached the state of *Sahaj*; what is the nature and character of *Sahaj* experience?

Sach Khāṇḍ, the last of the five *khangs* or stages is the realm of Truth, the ultimate stage of human aspiration and experience in which one reaches a state of absolute blending with the Absolute, a state which is beyond words, beyond articulation and can be known only in experience. It is beyond the three *gunas*³: *tamas*, *rajas* and *sattva*,⁴ and is hence called the *chauthā pad*, the fourth state. It is also called the *sahaj pad*, *turia pad* or *avasthā*,⁴ that is, the supreme state, the *param pad*⁵, the absolute state, the *amara pad*⁶, the deathless state. It is a state of absolute peace

and tranquility⁷, of changelessness since it lies beyond the cycle of birth and death⁸, and of eternal wonder and bliss⁹; it is also a state of ineffable glory and light radiating beyond the *dagam duār*¹⁰ or the tenth door. The *Sahaj* blending or merger is like the blending of the light of the individual with the light of God¹¹, like that of a drop of water into that of the ocean.¹² It is a state of existence in which the *ātma* of the individual is dissolved and absorbed in the *Paramātma*, and the inner duality dies within¹³. It is variously described as *suni* (*śūnya*) *samādhi*, *sahaj samādhi*, *sahaj yog*, for instance, and the experience itself as *mahāsukh*, *param sukh*, *param ānand*. Indeed, the *Sahaj* state is not merely the Ultimate Reality, it is the Lord (*Prabhu*), the ultimate in-dwelling Beloved in whom one is merged or absorbed.¹⁴ One who achieves this state of being is described by Guru Nānak as *jivanmukta*, and the state itself is described as that of *jivanmukti*.

The word in which this absorption or blending or merger is characterised is a very significant one; it is either *samati* or *samaunā* as in *sahaji samati*,¹⁵ *sahaji samaunā*, *joti joti samaunā*¹⁶, *sabadi samaunā*, *sachi samaunā*, for instance, the root verb in each case being *sam* which literally means to equalise, merge, blend, absorb, fill, pervade, unify. But from the context in which the word *samati* or *samaunā* is used it is clear that what is meant is absolute absorption, unification, merger or blending in a manner so as to leave no trace or consciousness of duality or separate identity.

Apart from the characteristics of peace and tranquility, of wonderment and bliss and of ineffable radiance by which one recognized the *Sahaj* state of being, Guru Nānak recognized another, that of *anāhad sabad*¹⁷, an unstruck sound which he used to experience within himself at that ultimate state of being.

All said and done the fact remains that in whichever manner one seeks to describe the *Sahaj* experience, its real nature must elude understanding in humanly communicable language. The articulation of an experience which was essentially a mystical one and hence, according to Guru Nānak himself, was incapable of being translated in communicable terms, was indeed beyond human expression, had necessarily to be in traditional mystical terms made current and somewhat understandable by his predecessors belonging to various mystic orders of *sants* and *sādhus*, and in well-known traditional symbols and images that had some meaning, howsoever vague and generalized, to those whom his words were addressed to.

What I have just essayed to do is to present, as faithfully and as briefly as possible, the nature and character of *Sahaj* as was sought to be articulated by Guru Nānak himself at different places of his enormous corpus of *sabads*, or *dohās* and *sloras*. Yet it must be recognised that at the ultimate analysis the essential nature of the experience lay in the experience of the actual absorption or union itself by one who experienced it in the lineaments of his being. That Guru Nānak was convinced that one did so by his senses and the mind, all physical entities, there is no scope for doubt. He is very clear, precise and definite when he says : "This body is the abode of God, His palace where-in He shines in infinite rediance. By Guru's word one is ushered into the palace. There alone one comes face to face with God.¹⁸"

Was Guru Nānak absolutely original in what he said about *Sahaj*, its nature and character ? Were the terms and concepts like *sahaj*, *anāhad sabad*, *samati* and *samaunā*, *mahāsukh*, *sahaj samādhi*, *jivanmukti*, etc. and the nature of the description of the experience of *Sahaj* entirely his own ? If not, where did he get them from ? Did he accept and adopt whatever he received from his inheritance ? If he did

not, where-in did he differ, and how did he state his position, in the light of his own personal experience, without doubt?

An attempt may be made afresh¹⁹ to answer these questions, as briefly and as precisely as possible. There are many points of similarity and difference and divergence between Guru Nānak on the one hand and the totality of the Indian medieval protestant and non-conformist mystic tradition and the individual mystics belonging to this tradition, on the other. Basically and in all fundamental matters these individuals and the orders they represented, beginning from about the tenth to about the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries of the Christian era, belonged to the same tradition and subscribed to the same attitudes and approaches towards religious and spiritual life in general and Brahmanical Hinduism, traditional Buddhism and Jainism and Indian Islam in particular, especially in regard to the behavioural pattern of the followers of the respective cults and faiths. But for the purpose of this paper I shall confine myself to one concept alone, that of *Sahaj*, and its nature and character, of the Indian medieval mystics, considered individually and collectively, and try to find out answers to the questions I have put to myself in respect of this one particular concept.

II

One of the tallest of Guru Nānak's predecessors, perhaps an elder contemporary, in the line of mystic *sants* and *sādhus*, and the greatest representative of what is called the Sant synthesis, was Kabir, and it was Kabir's way of life and thought that seems to have had the greatest impact on the life and mind of Guru Nānak, the Nāthapanthī and Kānphāṭa yogis and the leaders of the Bhakti movement,

figures like those of Rāmānand and Nāmdev, for instance, being the next formative influences on him. But insofar as the concept of *Sahaj* is concerned it would be enough if we turn to Kabir and the Nāthapanthi *yogis* in the first instance, and in the second, to the Sahajayāni Buddhists and their spiritual descendants, the Sahajiyā Vaishṇavas and Bāuls of Bengal, since all these sects and cults came to accept *Sahaja* as the Ultimate and Absolute reality. The Sufi saints did not accept the term, but they too conceived the Ultimate Reality in terms of the Supreme Beloved just as Kabir and Dādū, even Guru Nānak, the Sahajiyā Vaishṇavas and Bāuls of Bengal and other devotional sects and cults did under the impact of the Bhakti movement. The *sants* and *sādhus* of northern India seem to have had already achieved a kind of synthesis between the *Sahaja* and *Sufi* ideas when Guru Nānak emerged on the scene of medieval Indian religious thought and activities. Many of the medieval *sants* and *sādhus* including Guru Nānak, identified the Supreme Beloved who was none other than *Sahaj* itself with Rāma or Kṛṣṇa with whom they sought a personal relation of intense love. But it must be pointed out at once that the *sants* and *sādhus* including Kabir and Guru Nānak, were never tired of asserting that this Rāma or Kṛṣṇa was not any historical or even a mythological person, not any incarnation of God nor even of Rāma or Kṛṣṇa himself; indeed he had no anthropomorphic form whatsoever. As a matter of fact they conceived their Rāma or Kṛṣṇa as an in-dwelling principle which was the Ultimate, formless, colourless reality immanent in man; it was none other than God himself. *Sahaj* experience was indeed with them God experience itself.

Kabir characterises the experience of *Sahaj* as the ultimate human experience of bliss and peace; he calls it *sahaj samādhi* which one can attain by finally arresting all

the functions of the mind and hence by creating an absolute vacuity within. He therefore characterises *Sahaj* as *suni* (*sūnya*) *sahaj* which he describes, just as Guru Nānak, following him, does, as a state of supreme peace and bliss, of *mahāsukha*. It was a state of absolute merger in which there was left no trace of duality. What is significant is that the term for merger or blending or union that Kabir uses is *samanā* which is the same as in Guru Nānak²⁰. Speaking of *Sahaj* Kabir says: "Everybody speaks of *Sahaj*, but nobody knows what *Sahaj* really is. *Sahaj* really is when one gives up all his desires, keeps his senses under his full control, when his son, wife, wealth and desire are all kept aside and when Kabir becomes the maid of Rāma; that is real *Sahaj* when one is united with Rāma, that is, with the Lord, in a natural manner."²¹

It is to be noted in this connection that when Kabir speaks in terms of union or merger or blending of himself as the maid of Rāma with his only beloved Rāma himself, he is not thinking in terms of a physical union of the two physical sexes, though the imagery is one of such an union. All that he meant was the union of two principles: the individual self, and the Universal Self, both innate and immanent in man's very nature, the reason why the union was called *Sahaj*, a term which literally meant what originated with the birth of any entity (*sahajāyate iti sahaja*).

Dādu, a spiritual successor of Kabir, one of the front-rank *sants* and perhaps a younger contemporary of Guru Nānak, speaks of *Sahaj* in the same strain and characterizes it more clearly and emphatically. He too, says that this is the ultimate end of all religious and spiritual quests. He too, asserts that *Sahaj* which is *sūnya* or vacuity is the Ultimate Reality. *Sahaj* is the supreme Beloved, the Lord or *sāmi* (sans. *svāmi*), or Rāma who is none other than the formless non-dual God with whom one seeks absolute

blending through intense love and devotion. This state of union, blending or merger is the state of *Sahaj* experience. "When consciousness reaches the *Sahaj* state", says Dādū, waves of duality vanish, hot and cold become the same, everything becomes one." Elsewhere he says: "Where there is no two, there is *Sahaj*, there joy and sorrow become one. *Sahaj* neither lives nor dies; it is the state of complete *nirvāṇa* ..Amidst all duality hold your consciousness in the vacuity of *Sahaj*, and drink nectar when you have attained the final state of arrest and then there is no fear of death or of the flux of time". In a number of *dohās* Dādū goes on speaking endlessly as if it were, of the nature and character of *Sahaj*, more or less in the same lines as Kabir does, using more or less the same images and symbols. "One's self is a tender plant wherein blooms the flower of *Sahaj*; the true *guru* teaches how to achieve it in a natural way, but very rare are the persons who can understand it." Elsewhere he says: "*Prāṇa* and *pyāṇa* (the vital breath and body), flesh and blood, ears and nose, all play wonderful sport in *Sahaj*.²²"

Did Kabir and Dādū, as a matter of that, the *sants* of the *Nirguna-sampradāya*, speak of any yogic physiological practices as helpful and necessary for reaching the state of *Sahaj*? It is not absolutely clear that they did, to my mind. Indeed, an analysis of the *dohās* of Kabir does not show very clearly if he had a regular system of psychological and physiological discipline or *yoga* involving the hundred-petalled lotus, the *shat-chakra*, the control of the vital wind and the nervous system etc. as one reads of about the discipline in any authoritative Tāntric text. Yet we know that Kabir speaks of two channels as the Tantric *Hāṭha yogis* do, and describe them as the moon and the sun or the *Gāṅgā* and the *Yamunā*, and a third, which together is called *Triveni*, the middle channel or nerve being referred to as

the channel leading to *Sahaj*, to all of which he refers nevertheless. He also refers to the drinking of nectar issuing out of the nerve called the moon which is located on the Mount Meru or the spinal cord²³. Kabir called his system *Sahaj Yoga* and the *Sahaj* experience, *Sahaj Samādhi*, just as Guru Nānak does at a later date ; but as one looks closely into the system and the context of the terms and symbols he uses to describe it, one does not feel absolutely convinced if Kabir had come to accept and adopt the yogic tradition of Tāntric *Hṛdaya* made current by the Sahajayāni Buddhists and the Nāthapanthis, for instance. Recent researches²⁴ have tried to prove that the leading *sants* of the Nirguna-sampradāya did all come to accept what is usually known as the Tāntric yogic practices as an integral part of their religious and spiritual discipline, their imagination and intellect. Indeed, a comparative study of the terms, phrases, imageries and symbols, and even of the language itself of the *sants* and *sādhus* of the medieval period show a remarkable similarity between theirs on the one hand and those of the Sahajayāni Buddhists and the Nāthapanthis, for instance, on the other.²⁵ In fact, some of the *dohās* of Kabir and Dādū read almost as translations or transcreations of the *padas* and *dohās* of the Buddhist Siddhāchāryas. Even so, I am not absolutely certain that the Tāntric yogic terms, concepts and phrases used by Kabir and Dādū, for instance, were anything more than just images and symbols, figures of speech, so to say, made use of by them since these had a symbolical meaning well understood by those to whom these words were addressed. But in this paper, I should not be dealing with Kabir or Dādū, but with Guru Nānak alone.

III

There were many elements in the Sant tradition, in a number of other protestant and non-conformist sects and in Guru Nānak himself, which were common to the Nāthapanthis and their predecessors, the Sahajayāni Buddhists. It is perhaps necessary to mention them here since, to my mind, they were the pre-conditions of the *Sahaj* experience, that is, these elements constituted the stages of preparation and of the psychological pre-condition which led to the experience of that state of peace and bliss, happiness and radiance which was called *Sahaj*. Negatively speaking, these were (a) sharp criticism and rejection of all external formalities in regard to religious practices and spiritual quests, and (b) protest against and rejection of priestly and scriptural authority, celibacy, penances, austerities and the like. Positively, the most important elements were (a) recognition of the *guru* as essential for any spiritual exercise and quest, (b) recognition of the human body as the seat and habitat of all religious and spiritual experience, indeed of the Truth or Ultimate Reality and hence rejection of any transcendental reality external to man, and finally, (c) recognition of the experience of the Ultimate Reality as one of inexpressible happiness and ineffable radiance, waveless equipoise, absolute peace and tranquillity, and of absolute non-duality or complete unity. The Sahajayāni Buddhists, the saintly poets of the Sant tradition, Kabir and Guru Nānak knew this experience of the Ultimate Reality as *Sahaj*; indeed the *sants* and Guru Nānak seemed to have received the term and concept as an inheritance from the Sahajayāni Buddhists who in their turn seem to have received not the term but the concept of the resolution of the duality through an absolute union of two principles, one male and another female, as well as

the nature and character of the ultimate experience, from the older Mahayāna-Vajrayāna Buddhist tradition²⁶. The Sahajayānis too, knew this experience as one of *mahāsukha*.

The Nāthapanthis however did neither accept the term, nor the concept in its entirety, though the description of the nature and character of the ultimate experience reads more or less similar, if not exactly the same. Yet the fact remains that there are yogic terms and concepts in the Nāthapanthi tradition, which were accepted and adopted by the *sants* like Kabir and Dādū as well as by Guru Nānak. This tradition therefore deserves a certain consideration.

Judging by the north Indian regional literatures on the Nāthasiddha *yogis* and the variety of myths and legends connected with them, it would seem that the Nātha movement was at least a pan-north Indian one, and if Matsyendranātha is regarded as one of the originators of the cult its antiquity must be at least as old as that of the Sahajayāna. Apart from a general predilection towards occult practices and acquisition of supernatural powers, the Nāthasiddhas owed their religious affiliation to the Siva-Sakti cult, but their religious discipline was that of *Hathayoga*, which was almost an article of faith with them. Yogic practices, somewhat of the nature and character of those of the Nātha *yogis*, were common to the Sahajayāni Buddhists and other esoteric sects, but with the Nātha-*yogis* these were the most important means of achieving their goal while with the others these constituted only one of the disciplines. With the former it was altogether physiological while with the latter it was also a psychological discipline.

Besides, the greatest and most important difference lay in the ultimate goal itself. The ultimate objective of the Sahajayāni Buddhists, of the *sants* like Kabir and Dādū and of Guru Nānak, was the achievement of *Sahaj* experience which the Sahajayānis identified with *mahāsukha*, but the Nātha-

yogi objective was to attain the state of *jivanmukti* or immortality in life, according to their own way of life and its interpretation.

How did they propose to achieve this end ? Bereft of esoteric complexities and scholastic niceties as recorded in relevant texts²⁷ their position may be stated, for our present purpose, as follows :

This ordinary human body is a raw, indeed a very imperfect, a most inadequate object for the achievement of *jivanmukti*, that is, for freedom from bondage of decay and death, in other words, of immortality. But through the yogic processes of *ulṭā-sādhanā*, that is, by making the vital fluid flow upwards instead of downwards, which is the natural physical law, and of *kāya-sādhanā*, that is, by the disciplining of the muscles, sinews, ducts, nerves and nerve centres as well as of the mind through perfect control of the vital wind, this raw, imperfect body can be transformed first, into a *pakkva deha* or ripe body and then transubstantiated steadily into a *divya deha* or divine body, which was the only way to overcome decay, destruction and death. This disciplining of the body and the mind involved a detailed classification and analysis of the entire human physiological system so well-known in *Hathayoga*; it also involved according to Nāthayogic interpretation, a number of theoretical postulates and actual physiological processes which have all been studied, analysed and described in some detail by competent scholars²⁸. For our purpose, I need not go into any of these very intricate details ; I need only point out that the conception of the sun and the moon identified respectively with Sakti and Siva on the one hand and with woman and man on the other, had an important role to play in the yogic scheme of things of the Nātha-yogis. The sun and moon were usually understood to stand respectively for the right and left nerve channels and their union as the

union of the two channels of the vital wind. The sun is also supposed to stand for fire or heat or *agni*, and the moon for *somarasa*, the nectar essence, the former being the consumer of the latter, the two in their balanced combination constituting the principle that was supposed to sustain physical existence, the one, that is the moon, standing for creation and preservation and the other, the sun, for decay and destruction. The moon was therefore supposed to stand for Siva and the sun for Sakti, also therefore, for man and woman respectively. The moon being the source of creation and preservation (=Siva=man), it was supposed to hold in its bosom the *amṛta* or nectar which was otherwise called *mahārasa* (or *bindu*, the vital secretion) which the sun (=Sakti=woman) was always after to consume. The Nātha-yogic aim was to save this *amṛta* from being consumed by the sun; their method of doing so was by a particular *mudrā* in their yogic practice which involved the conception of the *daśama dvāra* of the body, which was distinguished from the other ordinary doors. Since the sun was equated with Sakti=woman who was always eager to consume the *amṛta* (=bindu) of the moon, the Nātha-yogis tried to keep away from women as far as possible, indeed to shun them altogether, though they, in some of their yogic practices, had to use women but as mere instruments. This aversion to women is traditionally attributed to Gorakshanātha and his disciple Charpaṭanātha, both of whom seem to have had a great sway in the Panjab.

The attitude of the *sants* like Kabir, towards women was certainly derived from and conditioned by that of the Nātha-yogis. Kabir refers to women as tigresses who were always seeking men to prey upon to suck their vitality out of them. The general attitude of the other *sants* including that of Tulsidās, was not different, it seems.

IV

It is exactly here, that is, in their attitude towards women that the Sahajayāni Buddhists differed most from the Nātha-yogis, as well as in another, namely, in the ultimate objective of their spiritual quest and in the general approach towards it. Yet the practical *yoga* discipline followed by the Sahajayānis did not materially differ much from that of the Nāthapanthis.

The Sahajayāni objective was not immortality in any physical sense but frankly, the peaceful, blissful, radiant, changeless and hence waveless experience of *Sahaja* which was one and the same as *mahāsukha*, the great happiness. By its very nature *Sahaja* experience was indescribable; it was essentially non-dual in character and was, in their interpretation, the Ultimate Reality.

How does one achieve this *Sahaja* objective?

The Sahajayānis in common with all other contemporary protestant Tāntric yogic cults and sects, considered the human body itself as the seat of all human experience including that of *sahaja-mahāsukha*. According to them everything lay within this human frame, nothing outside of it, and that this human body was but the microcosm of the macrocosm universe. It was therefore in the nature of things that in their religious attitude and practice the body, that is, the physical system which was generally very well-known to all Tāntrics, would receive great attention from them. The six nerve-plexuses or *shat-chakra* of yogic texts, was reduced by them to three and these three were identified with the three *kāyas* of Mahāyāna Buddhism, namely, the *Nirmāṇakāya*, the *Dharmakāya* and the *Sambhogakāya*. To these three was added a fourth, called *Vajra* or *Sahajakāya* located in the *ushṇīshakamala* (the

sahasrāra of Hindu Tantra) which was known also as the *mahāsukhakamala* or *mahāsukhachakra*. *Śūnyatā* and *Karuṇā*, otherwise known as *Prajñā* and *Upāya*, were identified with the two nerve channels on the two sides of the spinal cord, the third channel which was the meeting channel of the other two being the most important since it was supposed to lead the *Sahaja* upwards and was called the *Avadhūti mārga* or *Avadhūtikā*. The union or blending of *Śūnyatā* and *Karuṇā*, or in other words of *Prajñā* and *Upāya* which together constituted the Bodhicitta, in the third channel, the *Avadhūtika*, was therefore the aim of the *Kāyasādhanā* or the physical discipline of the *Sahajayānis*²⁹. It was along this third or middle channel, the *Avadhūtikā*, that the Bodhicitta was supposed to be raised upwards to the *usñishakamala*. But this esoteric yogic practice was not merely physiological in character; it was also supposed to have a strong psychological undertone, the union of *Śūnyatā* and *Karuṇā*, imagined as and identified respectively with the male and female principles, being one surcharged with emotion.

Indeed, the identification of *Śūnyatā* with the male and *Karuṇā* with the female principle transformed the character of the physical discipline of *yoga* within the individual human body, into a kind of sexo-yogic practice, thus introducing an external element into it in the shape and form of a woman. The image and practice of *mithuna* thus became the most important element in the Tāntric yogic practices of the *Sahajayāni* Buddhists, an element which was not accepted and adopted by the Nātha-yogis. Women therefore came to occupy a significant place in the *Sahajayāna*; indeed in the literature of the particular *yāna* she is idolised and idealised.

The nature of the union or blending is however described as having no trace whatsoever left of any external

element, of duality in any sense; indeed it was characterised as *samarasa*, a state of non-dual unity, which is the same as Kabir and Dādu would characterize it. The achievements of the state was indicated by an *anāhata dhvani* or *sabda*, an unstruck sound that preceded it. The sound was supposed to be produced at the moment when the flow of the right and left nerve channels, *Śūnyatā* and *Karuṇā*, or *Prajñā* and *Upāya*, were controlled and made to flow into the third or middle one, the *Avadhūtikā*, thus enabling the Bodhicitta to rise upwards to the *ushṇiṣhakamala* or the *mahāsukhakamala*¹⁰.

V

The *sabads* of Guru Nānak as compiled in the *Ādi Granth* do not lend themselves to the spelling out of the details of the kind of Tāntric yogic practice that he may or may not have followed and laid down for his disciples to follow. From his use of such technical terms as *sahaj*, *daśam duār*, *samanā* or *samaunā*, *amṛt*, *anāhad sabad*, *mahāsukh*, *jivanmukti* etc. one would tend to think that the Guru must have accepted and adopted some kind or other of the Tāntric yogic practices of the Sahajayānis, the Nathapanthis and the like, particularly in view of the fact that his immediate predecessor in the *sant* line, Kabir too, used some of these technical terms in his *dohās* in connection with his way of religious and spiritual pursuit.

Personally I cannot agree with such a view.

It is perfectly true to say that both Kabir and Guru Nānak not only used the term *Sahaj* but also spoke of the nature and character of the experience in more or less the same terms and images as the Sahajayāni Buddhists did. It is also true that both of them shared the general Tāntric

view of the importance of the human body as the seat and habitat of all religious and spiritual experience and that all such experience lay within, and not outside. Both of them use also terms like *amṛta* in the sense of nectar of immortality, and *samarasa* or *samanā* and *samaunā* which mean the same thing, that is, experience of absolute union and blending, *anāhad sabad* or *dhvani* in the sense of unstruck sound, and *mahāsukh* and *jīvanmukti* etc. in the senses in which they were understood in their times.

Kabir goes further even when he uses the imageries of Gaṅgā and Yamunā to mean the right and left nerve channels, the Triveṇī to mean the middle channel and the *satadal* or the hundred-petal lotus, the sun and the moon etc., and expresses his intense dislike of women. That he borrowed these words, phrases and images and his dislike of woman from the Tāntric yogic tradition, more particularly from that of the Nātha-yogis, there could hardly be any doubt about. Guru Nānak does not, however, seem to be using these words, phrases and images nor does he seem to have inherited the intense dislike of women of the Nātha-yogis and of Kabir.

Yet, the question remains even in respect of Kabir as to what extent these borrowings were just echoes of a tradition, just uses of words, phrases and images that had more or less common currency among heterodox, protestant and non-conformist mystic cults and sects, sort of a language that was understood by them, and that they had no actual relationship with any kind of Tāntric yogic practice. From the closeness of Kabir, Dādū and number of others belonging to the Sant tradition, with the Sahajayāni and Nāthapanthī traditions insofar as their terms and concepts, images and symbols were concerned, one may, however, for argument's sake, concede that they had

adopted some kind of Tantric yogic practice, perhaps of the Nāthayogi tradition.

That it was *not* so at least in respect of Guru Nānak has been the impression left on me by the records left by the Guru himself, that is, by his own words.

Let me take the words and phrases, images and symbols used by the Guru, one by one, in their respective and relevant contexts.

Guru Nānak uses the term *amṛt*, as I have already pointed out, in the sense of nectar of immortality, but nowhere do I find him using the term in the sense of *bindu* or *mahārasa* (=the semen virile), that is, the vital secretion of which the moon happens to be the receptacle. Indeed, Guru Nānak does not seem to have used the images of the sun and the moon anywhere in connection with *amṛt*. Rather, to my knowledge, the use of the term is found in association with the *Nām*, the name of God, His name being the Truth. "Whatever God has made is the manifestation of His *Nām*" says the Guru. "There is nothing in creation which is not such a manifestation."³¹ This *Nām* is veritably the *amṛt* (=*nāmāmṛta*) the nectar of immortality, and it is in this sense and in this context that the word *amṛt* is more often than not used. Nowhere do I find any yogic meaning of the term. Guru Nānak also uses the term *mahārasa*, but nowhere in the sense in which the Sahajayānis did; indeed, here too, he uses it in the context of *Nām* which is *mahārasa* itself.

The term *samaṇā* or *samaunā* is, etymologically speaking, certainly related to the *sama* or *samarasa* of the Sahajayāni Buddhists. But it is significant that *samaṇā* or *samaunā* is never associated with *rasa*, that is, essence or juice. This term one finds used in such contexts or associations as in *sahaji samaṇā*, *sabadi samaṇā*, *sachi samaṇā*, *avigati samaṇā*, *joti joti samaṇā*³² etc. In all

these contexts and associations the clear and simple meaning of the term *samaunā* is 'union' or 'blending' which is qualified or associated with such words as *sahaji*, *sabadi*, *sachi*, *avigati* and *joti joti*, for no other reason than to articulate the nature and character of the union or blending. Nowhere does one find in this word and its image any yogic association or significance.

In common with the Sahajayāni Buddhists Guru Nānak used the term *mahāsukha* to describe the nature of the experience of the *sahaj* state of being, which may at once suggest a very close and intimate association with Sahajayāni yogic practices, especially because he also uses the phrase *sahaj yog* in this context. But here too, one must take into consideration the fact that he uses the term *mahāsukh* not in its technical Tāntric yogic meaning but synonymously with *param sukh* and *param ānand*, that is, in its literal sense of supreme pleasure, supreme joy and bliss. A technical term is not interchangeable, but Guru Nānak seems to have admitted the interchangeability of *mahāsukh* with *param sukh* and *param ānand*, and by and through this simple means he seems to have divested the term and concept of *mahāsukha* of all its exclusive Tāntric yogic significance.

Guru Nānak also uses the term and concept of *jivan-mukti* as I have already pointed out. But here too, if one has to go by the context, he seems to have used the term in its literal sense of liberation from bondage in one's temporal existence and not in the technical Tāntric sense in which the Nāthapanthis used the term. Indeed, with the latter *jīvanmukti* which they interpreted in terms of immortality, was the ultimate objective of their spiritual pursuits while with Guru Nānak *jīvanmukti* was but another name of what was the *Sahaj* state of experience. Besides, it only shows that the nature and character of the ultimate

experience were similar, perhaps even the same, but it is no evidence of the process or discipline being the same or even similar, that is, of Guru Nānak's *jīvanmukti* having to do anything with the Tāntric yogic practices of the Nāthapanthīs. Here too it seems to have been with him a meaningful phrase and nothing more.

Much more significant are the two terms and phrases *anāhad sabad* and *daśam duār*, both being technical in their use and traditional association with esoteric yogic practices. Guru Nānak seems to have derived both the components from the Nāthayogīs and Kabir, but he seems to differ from both in regard to their meaning and use. Kabir uses the term *sabad* (literally, sound) by itself in the sense of the Word of God, just as Guru Nānak does at a later date, but when Kabir uses the term in association with *anāhad* as in *anāhad sabad*, he does so, very closely it seems, with what the Nāthayogīs did, though in the utterances of Kabir it is by no means absolutely clear that it had any yogic significance.

That in Guru Nānak's case the phrase had no Tāntric esoteric yogic significance whatsoever, is more than clear. Let me quote a significant passage from the Guru wherein the component *anāhad sabad* (unstruck sound) has been used.

"Throwing one's doubts aside when one meets the Guru (=God), one can experience one's inner being. Prepare yourself even when you are alive for the place where you are destined to go when you die.....Through meditation on the Guru one hears the melodious *anāhad sabad*. When one hears it, his *haumai* (or ego or self) is destroyed....."³³

Wherever this phrase occurs it is always in such contexts that it does, especially so when the Guru is addressing his words to the Tāntric *yogīs* as if he was giving altogether a

new twist or interpretation to the component by using the same as they were so familiar with. In all such passages *anāhad sabad* is just a phrase which was being used not to indicate any Tāntric yogic experience, but one which could not be articulated in communicable language, in other words, which was inexpressible except in mystical but otherwise well-known phrases and images. In any case, in whatever context the component occurs, one does not seem to find any indication of any yogic association.

The same holds good in respect of the component *daśam duār*, the tenth door, one which occurs in a number of places⁸⁴. But in each particular case all that the phrase signifies is that it is the tenth or last door to cross before one can attain to the state of *Sahaj* experience, the door having no Tāntric yogic significance. The component which was admittedly a Tāntric yogic one in its origin, seems to have been used by the Guru more as an image, a symbol which had a meaning for those alone to whom his words were being addressed. Indeed, all such Tāntric yogic technical terms and concepts that Guru Nānak makes use of, including that of *Sahaj*, seem to have been, for him at any rate, nothing more than just a convenient means of communicating an idea of a mystical experience which was otherwise incommunicable. Terms and concepts like *anāhad sabad* and *daśam duār* or even *Sahaj* as Guru Nānak makes use of, or Gaṅgā, Yamuna, Triveṇī, the sun and the moon, the hundred-petalled lotus etc. as Kabir does, were admittedly of earlier Tāntric yogic origin and association, but with the *sants* of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and perhaps with the *Auls* and *Bāuls* of contemporary and later days (not with the *Sahajiyā* Vaishṇavas), these terms and concepts had become nothing more than figures of speech, with the potency and meaning of powerful images and symbols, but without any active association with the

Tantric yogic practices of either the Sahajayānis or the Natha-yogis or any other Tantric cult and sect. Rabindranath Tagore in the twentieth century made use of many of these images, symbols and figures of speech; it would be idle to speculate that he was a practitioner of *Hathayoga*.

Reading closely through the utterances of Guru Nānak as compiled in the *Ādi Granth*, I do not find anywhere any evidence of his being a practitioner of *Hathayoga* or any other kind of Tantric *yoga*, nor does he seem to have prescribed for his followers any such practices. Yet he was certainly a *yogi* in the best and most perfect sense of the term, but his *yoga* or discipline was not a physiological one in the Tantric yogic sense; it lay altogether in the disciplining of the mind and the senses through their concentration in meditation directed towards God, the Ultimate Reality. Indeed, he seems to have laid down a systematic process for the purpose.

Basic in this discipline was the conquest of the mind; "conquering the world is but the conquest of the mind", says the Guru³⁵. The preparation for this conquest lay along the path of meditation of and concentration on God, and destruction or effacement of *haumai*, that is, of the self or ego. God revealed himself in, indeed He was the *Sabād* or the Word, He was the *Nām* or the *Name*, the *Guru*, the *Hukam* or the Divine Order, the *Sach*, the Truth. It is these as an Unity that one must concentrate and meditate upon. God-experience is an inner experience; one must therefore cleanse and purify one's inner being. How does one do it? Guru Nānak's clear answer is, by loving devotion to and adoration of God³⁶, and by endless repetition and remembering of His Name, *Nām Simaran*³⁷. Filled by love for Him, saturated by His Name, enveloped by Him one reaches the state of *visamād*, of awe and wonder at the vision of the greatness of God³⁸. Then begins the ascent

towards the Ultimate Reality through the five *khanda*s or stages, stage by stage, until one reaches the *Sahaj* state of mystic experience which is the Ultimate Reality itself³⁹. These stages are not mutually exclusive nor are they one after the other in an ascending order; indeed they seem to be simultaneous.

Here there is nowhere the slightest trace of any kind of Tāntric yogic practice. What there is, is a religious and spiritual discipline or *yoga* of the simplest and yet the most difficult kind, a discipline of self-purification, of love and devotion, of concentration and meditation on God, the One and the only Ultimate Reality, without a second.

By laying down this discipline and this objective Guru Nānak saved the Indian world of medieval societies and religions from decay and disintegration and gave back to that world a much purer form of religious and spiritual quest. The leaders of the Bhakti movement and men like Kabir, the greatest spokesman of the Sant synthesis, also tried to do the same and succeeded in doing so to a very great extent. But the former, that is, the Bhaktimārgis, by bringing in the theory and concept of *avatāra* or incarnation of the Supreme Reality and those of Rādhā, and hence elements external to man, compromised the transparent and undiluted unitariness of God and of the essential importance of the human being itself. The latter, that is, Kabir, Dādū and others followed the Nātha-yogi tradition and inheritance so closely as to cloud and mystify man's vision of the Supreme Reality who, it seems, never comes out clearly, vividly and unequivocally from their utterances. Guru Nānak's position and statements are precise, clear and unequivocal and their ethical import and socio-religious significance deep and wide.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

N.B. All references to the *Ādi Granth* are from the standard text of *Sābadārath Sri Guru Granth Sāhib JI*, and follow its pagination.

1. *Dhānsari* 4, *Ādi Granth*, p. 661.
2. *Japji*, 34-37, *Ādi Granth*, p. 7-8.
3. *Dhānsari Ashṭapadi* 1, *Ādi Granth*, p. 688; *Bilāvalu Thitt*, p 840.
4. *Gauri* 12; *Ādi Granth*, p. 154, *Āsā* 22; p. 356.
5. *Siddh Goshji*. pauri 24. *Ādi Granth*, p. 940; *Prabhātt* 14, p. 1931.
6. *Tilang* 1, *Ādi Granth*, p. 725.
7. *Tukhāri Chhānt* 2, *Ādi Granth*, p. 1110; *Tilang* 1, p. 725; *Gauri* 10, p. 154; *Sārang* 2. p. 1197; *Sūhi Ashṭapadi* 2, p. 751; *Sūhi Chhānt*, 5, p. 766; *Āsā Ashṭ*, 7. p. 414; *Bilāvalu Ashṭ* 2, p. 832; *Mārū Solahā* 20, p. 1040.
8. *Tukhāri Chhānt* 2, *Ādi Granth*, p. 1110; *Sūhi* 4, p. 729.
9. *Mārū Solahā*, 15, *Ādi Granth*, p. 1038; *Malār* 5, p. 1256.
10. *Gauri Ashṭapadi* 15, *Ādi Granth*, p. 227; *Rāmakātt Ashṭ* 3, pp. 903-4; *Mārū Solahā* 13, 16, 19, 20, *Ādi Granth*, pp. 1033-40.
11. *Tukhāri Chhānt* 5, *Ādi Granth*, p. 1112.
12. *Siri Rāgu* 22, *Ādi Granth*, p. 22.
13. *Dhānsari* 4, *Ādi Granth*, p. 661.
14. "Jahai antar basai prabhu api nānak le jan sahaji samāti."
Anthology of Nānak's Poems, ed. by Pritam Singh, Amritsar edn. p. 367,
15. cf. 14.
16. *Tukhāri Chhānt* 5, *Ādi Granth*, p. 1112.
17. *Siri Rāgu* 18, *Ādi Granth*, p. 21; *Āsā Chhānt*, 2, p. 436.
18. *Malār* 5, *Ādi Granth*, p. 1256.
19. To my knowledge the best and most comprehensive attempt in this direction was made by my late friend and colleague, Professor Sasibhusan Dasgupta in his two publications : *Obscure Religious Cults* (second edn., Calcutta, 1962) and *An Introduction to Tantric Buddhism* (second edn., Calcutta, 1958). A somewhat partial attempt was made by P.D. Barthwal in his *The Nirguna School*

of *Hindi Poetry* (Banaras, 1931). But neither Dasgupta nor Barthwal dealt specifically with Guru Nānak though both referred to him somewhat casually as one in the total milieu of medieval Indian mystical and obscure cults informed or uninformed by *bhakti*.

20. *Kabir Granthāvalī* (Hindi), ed. by Syamsundar Das, Nāgri Prachāriṇī Granthmālā. pp. 89, 109, 111, 137, 138, 159, 199, 269, 316 and 318.
21. *Ibid.* pp. 41-42.
22. *Dādū* (Bengali), ed. by Kshitimohan Sen, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan. pp. 259, 313, 347, 382-84, 416, 422, 459, 461, 484 and 596.
23. *Kabir Granthāvalī*, op. cit. pp. 88, 98, 90, 91, 94, 110, 146.
24. Barthwal, P.D., *The Nirguna School of Hindu Poetry*, Chap. III; Singh, Mohan, *Gorakhnāth and Medieval Hindu Mysticism*, (verses of Beni, Nāmdev, Carapaṭi, and Guru Nānak reproduced as appendix), Lahore, 1937.
25. Dasgupta, Sasibhushan, *Obscure Religious Cults*: Second edn. pp. 360-366.
26. Dasgupta, Sasibhushan, *Obscure Religious Cults*, Second edn. pp. 14-50.
27. Dasgupta, Sasibhushan, *Obscure Religious Cults*, Second edn. Chaps. VIII and IX where all these texts and the yogic system of the Nāthayogis have been fully analysed and explained.
28. *Ibid* 27. Also, Dasgupta, Sasibhushan, *An Introduction to Tantric Buddhism*; Guenther, Herbert V., *Yugnaddha: or the Tantric View of Life*; Mallik, Kalyani, *Nāthasampradāyer Itihas, Darsan O Sādhanprāṇḍli* (Bengali); Dwivedi, Hazari Prasad, *Nātha-sampradaya* (Hindi).
29. Dasgupta, Sasibhushan, *Obscure Religious Cults*, pp. 77-86 and Chap. IV, pp. 87-109.
30. *Ibid* 29, p. 98.
31. *Japji*, 19, *Ādi Granth*, p. 4.
32. cf. 15 and 16,
33. *Siri Rāgu* 18, *Ādi Granth*, p. 21.
34. *Mārū Solahā* 13 (1), 16 (2), 19 (4), 20 (2), *Ādi Granth*, pp. 1033-40; *Gauri Ashṭ* 15, p. 227; *Rāmakālī Ashṭ*, 3, pp. 903-4.
35. *Japji*, 28, *Ādi Granth*, p. 6.

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36. *Gujarī Ashṭ 5, Adi Granth*, p. 505, for instance.
37. cf. 36; *Siddh Goshṭī 32-33, Adi Granth*, p. 941, for instance.
38. *Japji*, 24, *Adi Granth*, p. 5.
39. Besides the *Adi Granth* which is the only original source I have gone into, I am deeply indebted to two secondary sources :
1. Dasgupta, Sasibhushan, *Obscure Religious Cults*, second edn., Calcutta, 1962. and 2. McLeod, W.H., *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1968.

APPENDIX TWO

GURU GOBIND SINGH AND AFTER IN SIKH SOCIETY*

Three hundred years ago from now was born to the ninth Sikh Guru Tegh Bahadur and his wife Gujri, a son who in due course was christened Gobind Rai. Guru Tegh Bahadur died a martyr to a cause, the cause of freedom to pursue one's faith and one's own way of life, in the hands of the Mughal authorities when Gobind Rai was only nine. At that early age he found himself recognized and installed as the Guru of the Sikhs, a community of *sishyas* following a common ideal and a common way of life. He was the tenth in the line of spiritual and temporal succession from Guru Nānak, and came to be known as Guru Gobind Singh.

The Sikhs, to begin with, were a community of diverse ethnic and social groups coming from diverse religious cults and social institutions but all within the broad framework of what is commonly known as Hinduism and the Hindu way of life, and belonging to diverse simple callings of which a rural agricultural economy was the base. But with the acceptance of the ideas, ideals and teachings of Guru Nānak and his spiritual successors they came to discard the system of *jāti* and the worship of icons of gods and goddesses as well as the rites and rituals as practised in Brahmanical Hinduism; they also discarded the anti-temporal ascetism of its religious orders and their other-worldliness, but did not choose to give up the basic ethical and metaphysical postulates of that religion and society. In tune with the

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spirit and dominant spiritual urge of the age, the age of Tantric, Sant and Sufi mysticism of the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries of Indian history and culture, they also came to commit themselves to what is commonly known as the Bhakti *mārga*, that is, to a kind of loving and devotional surrender to God as the one broad and straight road of spiritual life leading to spiritual freedom, but not to the asceticism that is often associated with certain aspects of devotional mysticism.

Almost from the very beginning the Sikhs marked themselves out as a distinct socio-religious group, a distinctiveness featured sharper by their acceptance of the institution and practice of proselytization and conversion which were both against the very spirit of traditional Hinduism, as legitimate ways and means of quantitative expansion of the community which was facilitated as much by their non-recognition of the socio-religious system of *jati* and meaningless rituals as by their definite recognition of the temporal, and the secular way of life with as much significance as the spiritual. The temporal and the spiritual leadership offered by the Guru, the supreme head of the community, the *guru* being an essential article of faith in any esoteric and mystic cult, also helped the process to a very great extent.

It was as the Guru of this increasingly expanding community, a community which was at this time rent by intrigues, plagued by strifes for power and prestige and challenged by a haughty and intolerant alien imperial authority and its agencies as well as by neighbouring Hindu feudal princes, that Guru Gobind Singh found himself in the late seventies of the seventeenth century when he was just in his early teens. For well-nigh thirty years he worked in and for this community, and when he died on 7 October, 1708, he left behind him a very large segment of the Indian

population all along the western and north-western frontier areas of India, organised and disciplined into a strong, united, determined, self-sacrificing, God-loving and God-fearing band of people dedicated to the service of God and men. They were indeed a great social and religious force to reckon with in the contemporary socio-political context in the sub-continent of India. Historically conditioned events and circumstances forced him to organize the community of which he was the Guru, on a footing of war and wage a life and death struggle against a powerful imperial authority that happened to be affiliated to Islam. But one must not forget that at the same time he had also to fight against Hindu feudal interests which were as much hostile as, if not more than, the Muslim imperial authority. What is important to remember is that a God-loving, God-fearing community of men and women inspired by a devotional religious fervour, had come to acquire by virtue of able management of their temporal affairs, sort of a temporal and spiritual authority that invited the wrath and persecution of the then imperial and feudal authorities. This was a direct threat to the freedom of their faith and their way of life. Guru Arjun and Guru Tegh Bahadur, the fifth and the ninth Gurus, sought to meet the challenge and died as martyrs to their cause, but such death was individual martyrdom which does not seem to have brought about any significant transformation of the community as such. Guru Gobind Singh therefore came to understand and interpret the confrontation in a different manner, and for about three decades of active life that was given to him, he provided a strong positive response to that confrontation. In the process the Sikh community emerged as a definite religious and socio-political entity somewhat democratized in its organisational structure, a well-organised force ready to fight, if and when necessary, against tyranny and injustice and against any challenge to one's faith and

way of life, yet basically adhering steadfastly to its strictly ethical and devotional manner of living.

Seen in the social context of the seventeenth century this was nothing short of a miracle, this transformation of a community brought about by one single individual. Times have changed, and so have the values of medieval Indian society of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. One no longer thinks and acts in terms of a God-centred, *guru*-centred socio-religious community or in those of a state within a state. Yet our basic values still remain the same: the human value of the right to hold to one's faith and to regulate one's total life in accordance with that faith.

The holding of this Seminar as a part of the celebrations commemorating the tercentenary of the birth of Guru Gobind Singh, has been planned and designed not only as a tribute to that great personality, but also as a testimony of our faith in this basic human value. Let us approach this seminar in this spirit.

II

Sikhism and Sikh society as they emerged from the transformation effected by Guru Gobind Singh, may be interpreted as the most significant, direct and creative response to the challenge that medieval Islamic socio-religious creed and political authority offered to contemporary Indian society. I may please be allowed to explain briefly what I mean.

India's confrontation with the socio-religious creed of Islam began within about two hundred years of the death of the Prophet. In its Sufistic manifestation of perhaps both Arabic and Persian origin, Islam started making a dent into Indian mystical thought from at least about the tenth

and eleventh centuries, it seems. But not until towards the end of the twelfth and beginning of the thirteenth century did Islam start asserting itself as an active socio-religious creed and political authority, both backed by powerful military might.

India's immediate socio-political response, to begin with, was one of what may possibly be described as passivity. Not that the contemporary ruling authorities did not offer any positive resistance; to be sure, they did. But the society as such, by and large, did not seem to have taken any notice of it and life went on as usual in a hierarchically graded and feudally organised rural agricultural society. India had seen many foreign invaders coming in, in wave after wave, and sometimes in considerable numbers, establishing their political authority in due course, in certain areas of the land, and then as time went on, slowly but surely, getting merged into the vast ocean of India's humanity and its way of life. This had happened to the Hellenistic Greeks, the Sakas and Kushāns, the Hūṇas and a host of others, for instance.

The then Indian communities did not realise that here in Islam and Muslim political authority was a socio-cultural and political phenomenon which was very much different from what they had witnessed and experienced before in their history; far less did they realise that Turko-Afghan Islam was different from Arabic or even Persian Islam in its Sufistic manifestation.

But with the passage of time the inevitable realisation dawned on the Indian society and socio-political authorities; they saw and understood the nature of Islamic political and military authority and the pattern of the working of the Islamic socio-religious creed making slow and steady inroads into the *jāti*-ridden and feudally structured Hindu society. The response of this society was not unilinear; indeed it took

more than one shape and form. The upper castes and classes, finding themselves powerless, started retiring into their own shells and by about the fourteenth century, became more or less a closed community except for those individuals and small segments that had come to be nourished by or to look up towards enjoying the political patronage of the alien ruling authorities. Confined within their self-imposed boundaries, this community, mainly led by the Brāhmaṇas and feudal landed interests, began to build up their resistance by tightening their social and religious codes and behaviour patterns. This was one kind of response, certainly a very negative one.

But on the periphery and outside of this closed society of upper caste and class Hindus, a process of social change was slowly taking place on more than one plane of Indian society. Mystic cults based on simple love and faith in God springing from the manner of living very close to the soil, also somewhat protestant and non-conformist in spirit and behaviour pattern insofar as Brahmanical Hinduism was concerned, were not altogether unknown in India. Votaries of these cults who often came from very lower grades of society where the hold of Brahmanical Hindu codes of social discipline and religious rituals was rather thin and loose, discovered a close kinship of spirit and behaviour pattern among the Muslim Sufi mystics whose number and influence among the common masses in the villages were considerable, despite the disapproval of official and orthodox Islam. Complete non-recognition of any kind of distinction between man and man based on *jāti* and class differences, of rigorous asceticism of any kind, of ritualistic worship of divinity in the form of icons, images and symbols, of differences of creeds and persuasions based on scriptural authorities, and positively, absolute surrender in love, faith, and devotion to one God-head conceived and interpreted in sort of a deep

personal relationship and love for man and devotion to one's day-to-day duties and obligations of life in a simple and unostentatious manner, were some of the important tenets and principles that provided the ideological base on which the common Hindu and the common Muslim, both bound together by an identity of interest, found a common platform. This was however of no concern to the upper strata of either the Muslims or the Brahmanical Hindus; they continued to remain mutually separate, exclusive and somewhat mutually hostile in spirit and attitude of mind as in socio-political action.

But from about the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries out of this simple faith and devotion of simple folks arose a great movement that spread from Sindh, Gujrat and Maharashtra to Bengal, Assam and Orissa. This movement is known in Indian history and culture as the Bhakti movement out of which arose a new class of *sants* or *sādhus* of whom Kabir was the foremost. They brought about a remarkable synthesis between some of the basic elements of Bhakti on the one hand and of the older indigenous mystical cults and Sufism on the other. This synthesis has come to be known in our culture as the Sant synthesis. Rāmānand, Nāmdev, Kabir, Guru Nānak, Dādū, Rabidas, Rajjab, Tulsidās, Chaitanyadev, to name only a few from amongst a host of others, all belonged to or were products of this movement which is generally known as the Bhakti movement, the history of which is more or less well-known.

But it must be remembered that each one of them came to function in a given social situation in a given region and in the context of a given tradition; in each case, therefore, the movement took different shape, form and style, though there was in each case a lowest common denominator that characterized them, and at the same time distinguished them from the orthodox, official and scholastic Hinduism and Islam.

A movement of this nature and of this kind of historical conditioning, may be negative in character as well as positive. *Bhakti* as understood and interpreted in medieval India was not the *bhakti* of the classical *Śāṇḍilya sūtra*, or of the Bhaktiyoga of the *Bhagavadgītā*, which was understood in the context of an intellectual, power-based and activistic philosophy. The *bhakti* of medieval India was an attitude based on a powerful emotion characterised by an intense love for and devotion to God as the Supreme Beloved involving, at times and situations, abject and unconditional surrender of one's self to this emotion in total or relative disregard of the human situation in which one found oneself. In temporal terms it encouraged, more often than not, passivity and even willing acceptance of or surrender to established authority, social, religious or political. That it was so may be seen, in the social context of the time, from what the great Tulsidas who was as much a product of this movement as anyone else, sought to hold up in his great *Rāmcharitmānas*.

But Guru Nānak found himself in a different social context. The main locale of his activities and those of his spiritual successors was mainly the land of the five rivers and the adjoining areas where the ethnic and social composition and the traditions of the people seem to have been somewhat different from those of the eastern Uttar Pradesh, for instance, where Tulsidas flourished. Panjab had been from pre-Christian centuries, witnessing and experiencing waves after waves of military adventures, plundering raids and political conquests leading to ceaseless socio-political and cultural upheavals one after another. History therefore taught Panjab and her people one very important lesson, namely, not to forget or be oblivious of temporal or secular situations of any given time or space, howsoever engrossed one might find oneself in matters of the mind and the spirit.

The *Ādi Granth* compiled by Guru Arjun, is regarded by the Sikhs as sacred as the *Qurān* of the Muslims or the *Bhagavadgītā* of the Brahmanical Hindus, or the *Old* or *New Testament* of the Christians. It is admittedly a sacred text, a scripture insofar as the Sikhs are concerned. Yet where else would one find such a socio-temporal consciousness as one does in this text? Consider this quotation from one of the passages: "Greed is the king and sin his minister", this in the context of the socio-political situation of sixteenth century India, or, "He who trieth to rule over another is a fool, an indiscriminate wretch," a *vāñi* Guru Nānak uttered in the context of the tyrannies of Bābur, the first Mughal emperor. This socio-temporal consciousness is transparent not only in the writings and utterances of Guru Nānak and his successors but also in those of Guru Gobind Singh. This is neither the place nor the occasion to refer to such utterances which are indeed very significant in the context of the times in which they lived, worked and died. But one cannot help mentioning that the *Ādi Granth* is a scriptural text which breathes in every page a socio-temporal consciousness which is remarkable and perhaps unique in the context of the time and space to which it belongs.

III

- But between Guru Nānak and Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth and the last of the Guru, who abolished the institution of the Guru and replaced it by that of the *Khālsā* and the *Sri Guru Granth Sāheb*, stretches and eventful period of about two hundred years of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries of Indian history as staged on the plains of both sides of the five rivers and in the Gāngā-Yamunā valley.

To begin with, it was a way of life, simple, pure, transparent, divested of all external rituals, totems and taboos, fetishes and distinctions of *jāti*, etc. of popular Hinduism, and a life committed to absolute devotion to the One and only Reality, the absolute God-head without shape and form, without origin and decay, without change. This was certainly a negation of Hinduism at the popular level, but it was also an acceptance of the metaphysical interpretation of the Brahman at a higher level, that is, at the level of pure and transparent monotheism where it could meet the challenge of the growing Islamic ideology in India. Devotional mysticism of the leaders of the Bhakti movement, of the Sants and Sufis was slowly but surely bringing about a transformation of the traditional Hindu mind, at any rate, among large segments of the people of rural agricultural northern India. When therefore the Islamic challenge made itself manifest more and more, a deeper dive into the essentials of the indigenous traditional faiths and practices was but inevitable. Many sects emerged out of this dive : The Nathapanthis, the Kabirpanthis, Dadupanthis, Nānakpanthis, Chaitanyapanthis, for instance; *panthas* or *marges* were but ways of life and thought initiated and laid down by the respective leaders. But many of these sects, gradually but inevitably through the centuries, all but lost their identity through a process of slow dilution and absorption, into the vast ocean of popular Hinduism; even the Chaitanyapanthis or the Gaudiya Vaishnavas of Bengal and elsewhere, despite their acceptance of community worship, singing and prayer as instruments of social integration in response to the Islamic challenge, succumbed to this process. But the Nānakpanthis who later on came to be known as the Sikhs, did not; rather as time went on they became more and more a unified, well-knit, well-defined and integrated community with an identity of their own.

This did not certainly happen in a day, nor without historical and sociological reasons. First, unlike the other leaders and founders of similar sects Guru Nānak was very particular on one aspect of the way of life he had initiated, namely, to take into consideration the socio-temporal, that is, the secular aspect of life with as much seriousness as the ethical and spiritual. This provided a solid material base for the community of disciples he sought to bring to being. It is significant that each Guru, from Guru Arjun onwards, was called *Sāchā Pādshāh*, the true king, spiritual and temporal, who was provided with all the symbols of royalty and who used to maintain a community kitchen which served alike the king and the cobbler. It was not without reason that peasants, artisans and traders flocked into his fold and found there a haven of hope and security. The foundation of the city of Amritsar and a series of other towns that was to serve not only as the holy cities of the growing community but also as trading and commercial centres, was very significant indeed. This emphasis on the material basis of life generated in the community an activistic attitude towards life from the very beginning, unlike any other sect that emerged out of the Bhakti movement.

Secondly, the historical situation of the late sixteenth and seventeenth century helped the process of growth and the build-up of the nature and character of Sikhism and Sikh society. Because of their secular and socio-temporal, activistic attitude, the community of Nānakpanthis grew up to be more and more socially and politically conscious than the other protestant communities. Indeed, the protestantism of the Sikhs was more total and all-pervasive. The *Ādi Granth* which was compiled by the Guru Arjun sometime towards 1604, is a testament of Sikhism, a religio-spiritual document, yet here is a document that reveals in a telling manner not only the contemporary social situation

in India but also exposes the social and political abuses of the times within the Hindu society as much as within that of the Indo-Muslims.

The history of the transformation of a pietistic, God-loving community to a highly organised socio-political body, spiritually awakened, ethically pure, but at the same time earthbound, dynamic, conscious, ready to fight evil even unto death, if necessary, is known to all students of Indian history and culture. For the first time fear of death, the darkest and deepest of all fears, was taken out of man, death nor merely in the heat and tumult of war but death in silent defiance of the most painful and torturous tyranny, the kind of death that Bāndā embraced and kissed in serene faith and supreme composure only a few years after the death of Guru Gobind Singh.

Guru Gobind Singh had a stormy career. His life was a continuous struggle against powers and forces that were much stronger and more relentless than his. Yet in the midst of this all he found time to devote himself to active religious and spiritual-pursuits and to literary activites; indeed his writings are considerable and these are all of high literary and scholastic merit. But the most significant event of his career is the installation of the *Ādi Granth* and the institution of the *Khālsā* or the *Panth* as visible and concrete symbols of the Guru, and the abolition of the institution of the corporeal Guru. The installation of the *Sri Guru Granth Sāheb* as the most important symbol was significant; it is not unlikely that it was kind of a response to the confrontation with Islam. Even to this day the air and atmosphere generated by the images and symbols, the community congregations, the readings of the sacred texts, etc. inside of a *gurdwārā*, are not very much different from what one finds in a Muslim *imāmbara* or even in a mosque. It all sounds like a paradox, yet this was what seems to

have been brought about by Hinduism and Islam confronting each other in a given historical situation, and out of this confrontation were shaped and formed the body and spirit of Sikhism and Sikh society as they emerged from the baptism of fire and steel through which Guru Gobind Singh took them. By the abolition of the institution of the Guru and replacement of it by the *Granth* and the *Khālsā* that were supposed to represent the collective wisdom of the community and by transferring power and sovereignty to the commonality of the land, he imparted to the movement a new direction which has not lost its potentialities even to this day.

IV

The story of Sikhism and Sikh society for about a quarter of a century after the death of Guru Gobind Singh, is one of extreme passions and prejudices, inhuman cruelties and barbarities and unspeakable misery and confusion that had ever afflicted the community. On one side there was Bāndā Bahādur who was fired by a furious religious zeal and burning spirit of retaliation against the tormentors of Guru Gobind Singh, his sons and his followers. He moved from one end of the Panjab to the other end of the hill states of the western Himalaya, spelling ruin and disaster and striking terror in the heart of his enemies of whom the Muslim ruling classes were the main target. These ruling classes were equally fired by religious zeal and by a spirit of retaliation because of direct affront to their authority. They were thus determined to exterminate the Sikhs altogether, and by the very barbarous manner of how they put to death Bāndā Bahādur and his countless number of followers they just seem to have given a foretaste of how they intended to

go about with this policy of extermination. For one more generation the Mughal emperor and his governors pursued their policy of cruel and relentless persecution to the extent that "the name of a Sicque no longer existed in the Mughal dominion. Those who still adhered to the tenets of Nanock either fled into the mountains at the head of the Punjab, or cut off their hair, and exteriorly renounced the profession of their religion."

Times were indeed very difficult for the entire community which after the death of Bāndā Bahādur, was left without a temporal leader. Adversity and confusion led naturally to the rise of small groups or sects within the larger community; a few of them chose to question the leadership even of the corporate body of the *Khālsā*. One of such sects was that of the Gaṅgu Sāhis, the followers of Gaṅgu who had once been blessed by Guru Amar Dās; another, for instance, was that of the Handaliās, later known as the Nirañjaniās, a sect founded by one Handāl, also another intimate of Guru Amar Dās. A third was that of the Ajit Singhīās, followers of one Ajit Singh who had been adopted by Guru Gobind Singh's wife, Mātā Sundāri. Besides these three there were also the older sects of the Dhirmalīās, the Mīns and Rāmrāiyīās who did not fully recognize the authority of the *Khālsā*; but these minor sects were mostly ineffective. The most serious challenge to the authority of the *Khālsā* came however from the Bandeis, the followers of Bāndā Bahādur, who after the death of the latter had presumably formed themselves, if not into a sect properly so called, into a closely knit group at any rate.

What kept up the spirit and morale of the common Sikh was their faith in the *Khālsā* and the *Sri Guru Granth Sāheb*; the more persecuted were they the more wretched were the conditions in which they had to live, the more were their determination not to yield, not to give up. In the

midst of this situation help and sustenance came from two unexpected quarters. The Udāsis were an old but unbaptized sect amongst the Sikhs and hence not held in esteem or even recognized as authentic by the Sikh community in general, a fact which saved them from persecution in the hands of the alien ruling authorities. These Udāsis took over the responsibility of looking after the Sikh places of worship and of the distressed Sikhs themselves. Then, there were the Nirmalā Sikhs who because of their relatively closer affiliation to and association with Hindu metaphysical thought and to some of the Brahmanical ideas and practices, were generally not held in good esteem by the more orthodox Sikhs. They too escaped persecution since they had their concentration in the Maīwa region of the Panjab, which lay outside of the disturbed and persecuted areas. During the darkest days of the faith these two not-so-esteemed sects helped to keep the torch of the faith burning and to hold the helpless and persecuted community together.

The story of how Zakariyā Khān, the governor of Lahore, was at last obliged to adopt a policy of conciliation, how a *jagir* and the title of Nawab were extended to the leader of the community, Sardār Kāpur Singh, how the latter created the *Dal Khālsā* out of which was eventually evolved the first five and later twelve Sikh *jāthās*, each with its own drum and banner and territory conquered or acquired by each, how Nawāb Kāpur Singh fought all his life against the mighty Mughals and took fullest advantage of the political confusion brought about by Nādir Shāh and how he came to command the respect and loyalty of the *jāthās* and their leaders, are all well-known to any student of Sikh history and politics. I need only underline the importance of the organisation by Kāpur Singh, of *Dal Khālsā* and its *jāthās* to whom he had given a set of rules and a constitution. The entire *Khālsā* of Guru Gobind Singh constituted the body of the membership

of the *Dal*, but none could join active service unless he had a horse of his own. Any Sikh had the freedom to join any of the *jājhās*, and all these *jājhās* were called upon to assemble at Amritsar at least twice a year to lay down general policies and programmes which were binding on all Sikhs. This assembly was called the *Sarbat Khālsā*, one of the duties of which was the propagation of the faith. The leader of the *Dal Khālsā* was the head of the Sikh community, of the Sikh religious organisation and of the emerging Sikh political authority ; but each *jājhā* had its own leader who was to be given loyalty and obedience by his followers and who in his turn was to look after and meet the requirements of the latter. Each *jājhā* could undertake an expedition or go to war under its own leadership, but it had to do so under the name of the body corporate or *Dal Khālsā*, and all booty collected or acquired had to be shared by all the other *jājhās*, each in proportion to its own strength.

The organisation of the *Dal Khālsā* has been rightly characterised as a landmark in the history of the Sikhs. It was indeed the armed strength of the growing and expanding theocracy of the community, and one can hardly doubt that it paved the way for the Sikhs to gain political power and authority. This was helped to a very great extent by the general political confusion and insecurity the northwestern areas of the country, particularly the Panjab, were passing through during and following the series of Durrani invasions. The social demand for protection from confusion and insecurity of the times, was fairly common in the villages as well as in the smaller urban areas. Here the Sikhs found an opportunity to extend their power, authority and influence. Instituting the system of *rākhi* (from *rakshā* or protection), they moved from village to village, tied the *rākhi* round the wrists of the village elders and community

leaders and extended to them overall protection, in lieu of one fifth of their income, twice a year, after each harvest, against the exploitation of the *zamindārs* and the ruling authorities as well as from the degradations of robbers and of Sikh individuals and groups themselves. This protection was extended by the chiefs of different units of the *Dal Khālsā*, and was welcomed by the people of all the regions of the Panjab, the western Himalaya and the northwest except those of the Sind Sagar Doab. Thus, in the name of protection was laid the foundations of Sikh political authority and a regular source of revenue for the Sikh church and the State.

The invasions of Āhmad Shāh Ābdālī and his son Timur, of the Mahrathas and the Durrani continued to keep the Panjab in a state of suspended animation for another three or four decades. It was a story of attack and counter-attack, defeat and victory, and insecurity and confusion most of the time. But the Sikhs were organised, disciplined and dedicated well-enough to take advantage of any weakness on the part of their enemies in any given situation and turn defeat ultimately into victory, so that by about the seventies of the eighteenth century they found themselves as masters of the whole of the then Panjab. It was no accident but a process of history that was set in motion by Guru Gobind Singh and directed intelligently and diligently, patiently but persistently and with loyalty and devotion to a cause, by leaders of the *Dal Khālsā* like Nawāb Kāpur Singh and Sardār Jassa Singh Ahluwālia and the chiefs of the various *jāthās*.

Well-nigh half-a-century was now over after the second re-organisation of the community in 1733 by Nawāb Kāpur Singh, the first being by Guru Gobind Singh himself in 1699. Now that the Sikhs found themselves in full political possession of the Panjab need was necessarily felt of another-

organisation of the community. I have already made a casual reference to the twelve *jāthās* into which the *Dal Khālsā* was organised by Nawāb Kāpur Singh. These twelve *jāthās* established themselves in different parts of the then Panjab and through slow acquisition of territories, evolved eventually into twelve local territorial powers, one of which alone, the Phulkian *jāthā* comprising the later princely houses of Patiala, Jhind and Nabha, was situated to the east of the Sutlej, the rest being all to the west of the river. These *jāthās* came to be called *misl*s, an Arabic word meaning, equal. One explanation is that since all the *jāthās* were equal in status and since there was complete equality among the members of any given *jāthā*, the *jāthās* came to be known as *misl*s. But there is another explanation which wants us to believe that at the Akāl Takht at Amritsar, the heart and the common assembly ground of the *Sarbat Khālsā*, that is, of the corporate community of the Sikhs, there were twelve separate account books of the twelve *jāthās*, to record the territorial acquisitions of each, and since the account books were called *misl*s, *jāthās* came to be known as *misl*s.

Be that as it may, it is the organisation and administration of these *misl*s and that of the central body of the Sikhs, the *Gurumatta*, that eventually led the Sikhs to a position of political pre-eminence during the days of Ranjit Singh on the one hand and their socio-political and socio-religious cohesion and solidarity on the other. There is scope for difference of opinion as to the nature of the *misl* organisation, that is, as to whether it was a 'theocratic confederate feudalism' as Cunningham described it, or 'an oligarchy based upon republican principles' as Gordon put it, or as Banerjee says, it was democratic in composition and religious in its cohesive principles'. One is apt to go astray, it seems, when one tries to explain a medieval

Indian socio-political and socio-religious organisation in terms of western political terminology. The bed-rock of Sikhism lies in its deep faith in an absolute God-head who was the protector of his followers, and next to God was the Guru who was their infallible guide. In the absence of a corporeal Guru this guidance lay in the word of the Guru as recorded in the *Sri Guru Granth Sāheb*. Collectively all temporal and spiritual authority, that is, sovereignty rested on the *Khālsā*, or now *Dal Khālsā* at the time we are speaking of, that is, on the body corporate of the entire community. The leader of the *Dal Khālsā* and the chiefs of the *misl*s, whoever they were, had to act in the name and under the authority of God, the *Sri Guru Granth Sāheb* and the *Khālsā* or *Dal Khālsā*. There were occasional transgressors, without doubt, but by and large, the leaders and the chiefs dared not act in defiance of the *Khālsā*, though within their own realms they were autocrats enough. In any case the theoretical position was acknowledged through out. Even a powerful leader like Ranjit Singh did not dare describe himself as *Mahārājā* or forget to acknowledge the overall supremacy of and allegiance to the *Khālsā*.

This fear of and respect for the *Khālsā*, the body corporate of the community on the one hand and the *Guramatta* which represented the collective opinions and decisions as to policies and programmes arrived at from time to time by the body corporate at the holy Akal Takht at Amritsar on the other, were the two main planks that sustained the community during the entire eighteenth century when the Sikhs had the hardest time in their history. I have already made a casual reference to the meetings of the *Sarbat Khālsā* held in the Akal Takht at Amritsar on certain festive occasions, when in the presence of the *Sri Guru Granth Sāheb* the general body of the Sikhs discussed and took decisions as to their plans, policies and programmes. These decisions

came to be called *Gurumattas* or the advice and opinion of the Gurus. In course of time these meetings came to be recognized as a sacred institution, such meetings being held at least twice a year, on *Vaisākhī* and *Diwāli* days. Apart from taking resolutions which were binding on all Sikhs, including their respective *misl* chiefs, the meetings also elected the leader of the *Dal Khālsā* army, decided on measures for the propagation of the faith, drew up plans for military operations and arbitrated on disputes between one *misl* chief and another, among other things. At the lowest level of the internal organisation of the *misl* was the village *panchāyat*, the assembly or council for the regulation and administration of village affairs, the sanction behind which was purely moral and social. Considered in the context of time and space, I for one, cannot help feeling that the Sikh community had indeed evolved out of necessity as much as out of the lineaments of their faith, tradition and behaviour pattern, a socio-political system that had, theoretically and practically, a sanction far more popular in character, perhaps far more moral too, than was evident in any other medieval socio-religious and socio-political community in India.

The last *Gurumatta* meeting was held in 1805 to advise Ranjit Singh on the policy he was to follow in his dispute between the Holkar and the British. But soon after Ranjit Singh chose to abolish the *Gurumatta*, since he no longer wanted to be bound down by the decisions of the *Dal Khālsā*, though he too dared not defy the authority and supremacy of the *Khālsā*, on the theoretical plane at any rate. His government was known as *Sarkār-Khālsā* and his seal used to bear the inscription *Sri Akāl Sahāi*.

Ranjit Singh was undoubtedly a confirmed Sikh who had inherited the total tradition of the faith, and the practices and behaviour pattern associated with it. But

one must admit, looking closely at his life and activities, that he was not essentially a man of religion, that he had not that involvement in and dedication to the faith and the community to which he belonged, the kind of dedication and involvement that characterised some of the leaders of the community, nothing to speak of the great Gurus. He was oriented politically and militarily, and all his motivations and actions were conditioned and determined by political and military considerations; the major urges and compulsions of the time perhaps dictated it. The choice of his military commanders, his high-level officers, the pattern of his military, civil and financial administration, his policy towards the Akalis of Amritsar and towards the Sikh *sardārs* or chiefs, all seem to point to that direction. Both politically and militarily as well as an administrator he was certainly eminently successful, and the way he resisted the onslaught of the British and contained them to the east of the Sutlej for a pretty long time, speaks eloquently of his political wisdom and military abilities. After a very long time he brought relative peace back to the Panjab, gave her a settled administration, gave to the people of the land in general and the Sikhs in particular, a sense of pride and self-esteem, and placed them on the road to prosperity. But I cannot help feeling that by abolishing the institution of *Gurumatta* he struck a decisive blow at the democratic decision making process of the Sikh community.

V

After the British annexation and the new settlement of the land of the five rivers, Sikhism and the Sikh community came to face new problems and new challenges, just as contemporary Hinduism and Hindu society did. Slowly but surely

Western system of education and administration, Western ideas and patterns of behaviour, Western thought and a new religion, Christianity, all borne on the wings of the British, started bringing about new situations and new responses, not always uniform and unilinear in character. These responses, to begin with, took the shape and form of movements seeking new adjustments of the old traditional order with contemporary ideas, thoughts and patterns of behaviour. At times they were reformist in attitude and approach, at others, revivalist in the main, and still at others reformist and revivalist at the same time. To give a well-defined, clear-cut label to the movements within the Hindu society, initiated and led by the Brāhma Samāj or the Ārya Samāj, for instance, or to the Chet Ramis, the Deo Dharmis and the Sanātan Dharma Sabhāites, is indeed very difficult and may at times be very misleading.

The same seems to hold good in regard to the movements within Sikhism and the Sikh Society. Some of these movements deserve mention, even very briefly though, since they seem to have a direct bearing on contemporary Sikhism and Sikh Society. They were all reformist in character, in the sense that they wanted to reform the faith and its behavioural pattern either by liberalising both as the Gulām Dāsis, an inconsequential sect, did, or by purifying both by throwing the dirt and dross that had accumulated on them for well-nigh two centuries, as did the Nirākāris and the leaders of the Singh Sabhās and of the Chief Khālsā Dewān. They were reformist in another sense too, namely, that they tried to infuse new life and activity into the body politic of the community and reorganize it, not in the shape and form but in the spirit and vigour of old, but in terms of new ideas and aspirations, which was so badly and so urgently called for.

Over the well-nigh two hundred years since the death

of Guru Gobind Singh Sikh society had gained in courage and consciousness in its own strength, in the spirit of sacrifice for the cause of the faith and the community, in political power and authority and in organisational capacity, but seems to have lost a great deal of its simple faith in and devotion to the fundamental tenets of the great Gurus, its high ethical standards and social virtues, and its protestant attitude towards Brahmanical Hinduism. The daily prayers if not forgotten, seems to have lost their spirit and fervour; day-to-day religious practices had been invaded by Hindu-Brahmanical symbols and associations to the extent that at the popular rural agricultural level worship of the icons of gods and goddesses had become all but common; birth, marriage and death ceremonies had once more become complex and expensive, and the practice of *sati* had been revived. Taking advantage of the general illiteracy and ignorance of the masses and the common human weakness for religious and spiritual guides and deliverers from sins, distress and difficulties, a number of leaders of the community claiming descent from the line of Guru Nānak or Guru Gobind Singh, set themselves up as *gurus* and drew the adoration and following of countless number of simple, ignorant folk. Added to all this were the activities of the Christian missionaries with the full moral and material backing of the British ruling authorities; to their exhortations and allurements many a Sikh fell easy prey including no less a person than *Mahārājā* Dalip Singh.

Almost all the nineteenth century reform movements within Sikhism and Sikh Society were but responses to these problems and challenges of the times.

The founder of the Nirankāri movement, Baba Diyāl died in 1855 at the age of 72, but before he died he had already made the impact of the movement felt throughout the Panjab and as far east as Delhi and Agra. The move-

ment struck deeper roots through the proselytizing efforts of his two sons who succeeded him on the *gadī*, one after the other. The Nirākāris stood for a simple and truthful life, derived all their tenets and inspiration from the *Ādi Granth* and drew closer to the original teachings of the Gurus. They tried successfully to simplify the birth, marriage and death ceremonies, preached against making offerings to Brāhmaṇas, against meat eating and taking intoxicating drugs and drinks. They also tried to popularize widow-remarriage and involved themselves actively in this reform. On the whole they seem to have been able to impart to certain sections of the contemporary Sikh community, a moral tone and to give a call towards more fundamental values of the faith.

At the other end was the so-called *Gulāb Dāsī* movement initiated by one Pritam Das, an *Udāsī fāqir*, but set in motion by *Gulāb Dās*, a *Jāt* Sikh, who was Pritam Das's main disciple. While they stood against all kinds of pilgrimages, religious ceremonies, veneration of saints etc., they were also at the same time against all kinds of moral restrictions built into the faith. Indeed, they seem to have pleaded for fullest gratification of the senses, for smoking and taking intoxicating drinks. Drawn mostly from more affluent classes the followers of the sect were *beaus* of a sort, donning costly dresses and indulging in all sorts of licences. One ethical virtue they valued however, and this was speaking the truth; indeed, they hated telling lies, and were very straight-forward in their behaviour pattern. One cannot help recalling to one's mind the Bengal phenomenon of Derozio and his followers in the "Young Bengal" movement earlier in the century.

But a much more significant movement was initiated by a sect known as the *Nāmdhāris*, otherwise called the *Kukās*. They were so called because of their emotionally frenzied shouting, screaming and dancing at the time of

reciting the *Nāma* and the *mantra* and singing the hymns of the *Ādi Granth*. With their turbans in hand and long hair flying they also indulged in dancing and screaming orgies in company of women who were not always properly dressed. But in their dress and demeanour, in their pattern of social behaviour, they were individually and collectively, simple, clean, truthful and absolute abstainers from smoking and taking intoxicating drugs and drinks. They were very positive in their rejection of all kinds of *jāti* prejudices and practices, and among the Sikhs, of worship of icons of gods and goddesses and of the sanctity of tombs, temples and mosques, of *brāhmaṇas*, *mahānts*, the Sodhis and the Bedis, of the dowry system, infanticide and child-marriage. Equally positively were they in favour of widow re-marriage, connubium amongst various clans and classes, and of equality of the sexes and of even free intercourse amongst them. They used to wear all the five 'K's and a turban wound and tied somewhat differently and called *siddha pāg*. All initiates were given a watchword, and a *mantra* whispered into their ears. They wore a necklace of white woollen knots that looked like beads, carried a staff and used white clothes of hand-spun and hand-woven material alone. They recognized no other sacred text than the *Ādi Granth*, but what was more important, no other Guru than Guru Gobind Singh to whom they seem to have attributed divinity, at any rate, at a certain stage of the movement. Again, at a certain high tide of the movement they seem to have developed some political consciousness as well, and became very much anti-British. In the late sixties and early seventies, under the leadership of their Guru, Ram Singh, they seem to have evolved a system of non-co-operation that involved the boycott of Government services except of those in the Police and the Army, boycott of British schools and colleges, of law and legal institutions introduced and

administered by the British, and of foreign clothes and dress. It also involved general disobedience of Government orders that militated against one's conscience. The exception made in the case of the Police and Army services was deliberately made since the Kukas wanted to receive police and military training, and this for obvious reasons. It is significant that when they presented themselves for recruitment they did not reveal their *Nāmdhāri* or Kuka identity.

Nominally the initiator of the movement was one Bālak Singh (1799-1861), but it was his disciple, Rām Singh (1815-1885) who was indeed the leader and who determined the nature and character of the movement. He was a fine and active organiser, and by the year 1870, within a decade and a half of the year of the so-called Sepoy rebellion of 1857, when on the day of *Vaisākhi*, Rām Singh gave initiation to his first four disciples, he had been able to establish more than two scores of preaching centres, in each one of which he had placed a deputy, called *Subā*, of his own, spread not only all over the Panjab but to such far off places as Kabul, Hyderabad-Deccan, Nepal, Lucknow and Banaras. By 1871 the number of *Nāmdhāri* Sikhs rose to more than ten lakhs, and he seems to have become recognized as *guru* by all his followers. His political instinct led him to organize a postal and information service of his own. He also established contacts, through his own 'embassies', with Kashmir, Nepal and Bhutan, and perhaps through correspondence, with Russia as well, through the governor of Chinese Turkestan.

That Rām Singh was deeply actuated by political motivations, that he infused into his followers a strong dislike of everything that was foreign along with a hatred for the British, and that he wanted to keep himself and his followers away from them, there cannot be any doubt about. He was also very much against cow-slaughter and hence

against the butchers as a community; more than once his followers went into mass killing of them. His contacts with Nepal but much more with Russia also aroused a great deal of suspicion. All these together made him a suspect in the eyes of the British ruling authorities who thought that he was out to carve out political power and authority in the name of a religious mission and movement, and the then Mahārāja of Patiala confirmed this suspicion. Rām Singh was deported to Burma where he breathed his last in 1885. All his deputies or *Subās* were also apprehended in the mean time and put into prison, and the movement was practically wiped out. But the Nāmdhāris are still a considerable sect among the Sikhs and they occupy a prominent position in Sikh economic life as efficient traders and merchants.

The Singh Sabhā movement which raised its head close on the heels of the Kukā or Nāmdhāri movement, had no political under or overtones. Indeed, its aim was exclusively socio-religious and cultural, and it came as a direct answer to the challenge of Christian missionary activities. Partly, it may also have been an answer to the proselytizing activities of the Ārya Samāj, at a later stage of the movement, at any rate. The first centre of the movement was Amritsar, but there it could not thrive for long. Another Singh Sabhā was founded at Lahore where it was activated by Professor Bhāi Gurmukh Singh. Loyal to and cooperating with the British ruling authorities but liberal in outlook, Bhāi Gurmukh Singh seems to have been one of the first of those among the Sikhs who seem to have understood the meaning and significance of what was happening in Bengal, Bombay, Poona, Madras and elsewhere in India since the days of Rājā Rammohan Roy. At the very beginning of his public career he enunciated a clear programme which he wanted to be worked out by the *elite* of his community

if they wanted to keep the light of Sikhism burning and the life of the community regenerated. In a word, he visualized a thorough reform of the existing state of affairs and a revival of the past glory of the faith and the community. To this end he wanted to develop the Panjabi language and publish magazines and newspapers in this language. In 1880 he himself brought out the *Gurmukhi Akhbar* from Lahore, the first Panjabi weekly in the *Gurmukhi* script. His programme included among other things, collection, collation and editing of all Sikh *ponthis*, that is, their canonical and not-so-canonical literature, popularisation of those books that related to and interpreted the story of the Sikh Gurus, their faith and the community they had brought into being, reformation of the *pūjāris* or priests of the Sikh *gurdwārās*, re-statement of the principles and practices of the Sikh religion and its active propagation, and establishment on modern lines, of Sikh educational institutions.

This forward-looking, constructive programme of Bhāī Gurmukh Singh, as a matter of that of the Lahore Singh *Sabha*, did not appeal to the Singh *Sabha* of Amritsar which, consisting as it did mostly of members drawn from the clan of the Bedis and the Sodhis who claimed lineal descent from Guru Nānak and Guru Gobind Singh and wanted to be extended preferential recognition as such and sometimes even as Gurus, were very backward-looking and conservative in attitude and outlook. They were also very conscious of their leadership and wanted to retain the importance of the *pūjāris* or priests of the *gurdwārās* so that the two together could control these places of Sikh worship and congregation, and hence of the Sikh society. Attempts were made to bring the two *Sabha*s of Amritsar and Lahore together, leading to a new organisation called the Khālsā Dewān, but the arrangement did not work for long because of basic differences between the two, in out-

look, approach and ideology.

In the meantime Bhai Gurmukh Singh died (1898). But his place seems to have been taken by Sardar Sundar Singh Majithia, and it was mainly through his efforts that in 1902 a new organisation came into being under the name of Chief Khalsa Dewan which tried to bring Lahore and Amritsar together. The main item of its activities lay in the sphere of modern education, both at the school and college levels, and in that of the improvement of the Panjabi language and literature. In both spheres the Dewan had achievements to its credit, but it could not keep the Sikhs together and impart to the movement a united front. New *dewāns* and *sabhās* were established at many places in the Panjab, often working towards the same aims and purposes but maintaining their respective identities.

Nevertheless the Singh Sabhas and the Dewans brought about a new consciousness, a new awakening as it were among the Sikhs, and slowly but surely ushered them from a medieval to the threshhold of a modern Indian community. The establishment of the *Khalsa* schools, colleges and other institutions of higher learning, of the Sikh Education Committee and the Khalsa Tract Society, the institution of periodicals like the *Khalsa Samachar* weekly, the holding of annual educational conferences and similar other educational activities were undoubtedly steps taken towards the modernization of a medieval socio-religious community. These steps inevitably lent impetus to the religious activities of the community as well. A new class of Sikh missionaries took to the propagation of the religion and led their campaigns into near and distant places, which resulted in a number of urban people seeking conversion to Sikhism.

These campaigns seem to have found support in such reformist movements as that of the Sodhi-Bans who gave out a call for return to the pristine purity of the religion as

preached by Guru Nānak.

VI

The story of Sikhism and the Sikh community of the twentieth century is a recent one and is within living memory. I need not therefore refer to it. For my present purpose it was not even necessary to tire you with this long narrative covering the two hundred years since the death of Guru Gobind Singh. Nevertheless I did so, for two reasons in the main.

First, in popular Indian vision and imagination the main story of Sikhism and Sikh society ends with Guru Gobind Singh, and then the colourful figure of Ranjit Singh comes as a sequel, not so much as an integral part of Sikh history as that of the general history of Indo-British confrontation, which perhaps it was. And then the curtain drops on the stage of the history of the faith and of the community sustained by it. In any narrative of these two, the events and situations following the death of Guru Gobind Singh and the tragic end of Bāndā Bahādur till the emergence of Ranjit Singh and during his life time, are treated more as isolated facts and factors wafted on the stage of Indian history by the winds of time than as a sequence, one following the other in close inter-relation. Hardly a narrative reveals any consciousness of cause and effect relationship and the conditioning facts and factors in contemporary Sikh and larger Indian society and politics. To my mind, Ranjit Singh's appearance was an inevitable sequel to a process of history, a process that was initiated and set in motion well-nigh a century earlier by Guru Gobind Singh. Many things happened in the meantime and during and after his death, including internal feuds and

sectarian rivalries amongst the Sikhs themselves. But a few things remained constant : the supremacy of the *Khālsā* and of the *S'rī Guru Granth Sāheb*; the identity and integrity of the community and a faith in their God-ordained destiny; and an almost instinctive sense of temporal realities of life, for instance. All these were the gifts of the Gurus, bequeathed as a trust to the community by Guru Gobind Singh, the last Guru. This trust, despite different methods of and approaches towards its maintenance, was never laid aside, not even by the most recalcitrant individuals and groups. My brief narrative was intended to bring this fact into relief.

Secondly, all history of the past is contemporary history in a very significant sense. One gathers the facts of the past and cannot help interpreting them in the light of one's own experience of the present. Looking at the way of life and activities of the Sikh community, individually and collectively, one gathers facts, impressions and interpretations which one, as a student of history and sociology, seeks to trace to their roots. One impression amongst others, seems to stand out, namely, the collective commitment of the community to the trust of the Gurus which I referred to a while ago. My brief narrative was perhaps necessary to bring this out as well. This is nowhere more clear than in the reform movements of the later half of the nineteenth and the first two decades of the twentieth century, especially of the Lahore Singh Sabhā, the Khalsa Dewān and the Chief Khalsa Dewān.

The Sikh community has nothing to be afraid of so long as they remain loyal to the trust bequeathed to them by their Gurus and by their history.

VII

This seminar has been planned and organized with a view to an analysis, critical and objective, and to an intelligent understanding of the historical and sociological forces that went to form the nature and character of Sikhism and Sikh Society from their early beginnings to our own days. Such an analysis and understanding will, I am sure, help us formulate the basic reasons and principles that lie at the bottom of the origin, evolution and growth of such a vital social and religious community as that of the Sikhs.

But this seminar aims at something more as well. We want to analyze and understand the social, economic and political forces that are at work amongst them today and are shaping and forming them in the context of contemporary India and the world. It is not enough to know that they are today the best producers of food in India, that they are guarding our frontiers and our freedom, that they are a virile, active and resourceful people with a love and zest for life which is as significant as their love for and devotion to a life of the spirit. We need to know, critically and objectively, wherein lie the sources of all these, and for this purpose we need to survey and analyze the Sikh society of today, its lineaments of faith and behaviour, its hopes and aspirations, its failings, failures and despairs. We should be able to find out what is happening to the various sub-sects, old and new, within the Sikh communities, to the *Muchis* and *Chamars*, for instance, who sometimes describe themselves, as I found out in Patiala, as Hindu Sikhs, to the growing industrial communities, to the *Sanatani* Sikhs, to the Sikh sects who describe themselves as *Udasis*, *Nirmalas*, *Nirankaris* and *Namdharis*, for instance, and to the Sikhs who describe themselves as non-Hindus, to the Sikh who finds his *kes* and *kangā* and *kārā*, *kirpan* and *kachchā* as brakes to the demands

and challenges of modern life, for instance, and how all other small or big segments are reacting to the socio-political demands and changes that are increasingly being made manifest in total Indian society, all from a purely objective and sociological point of view.

This is the least that this Seminar is expected to do, to pay our humble tribute to the memory of the Sikh Gurus, to the memory of that great son of India, Guru Gobind Singh.

It is unfortunate, to my mind, that Sikh studies have until our days, been confined in the main, to a chronological narration of the story of the community along the arrow line of time and against the background of contemporary socio-political events and situations and to matters that are purely credal and doctrinal, the latter without any reference to time and space, more often than not. Most writers and scholars of our times, who belong to the Sikh persuasion, have expressed themselves more as apologists of the faith and the society they belong to, than as objective and knowledgeable interpreters of them. They often tend to forget that Sikhism and Sikh society have stood the test of time and challenges of contending forces and do not stand in need of any defence from any quarter. Sikhism as a faith and Sikh society as an organized element of Indian body social and a socio-economically and culturally oriented and integrated unit of larger Indian society, is an existential reality of our contemporary life, and no individual and collective group can afford to ignore or even undervalue it. One need not therefore be an apologist of the faith nor a spokesman and interpreter on the defence. It is no longer necessary, I am sure.

What however is necessary today is the intellectual realization that one knows not Sikhism and Sikh society who knows Sikhism and Sikh society alone, to quote a well-known saying with but a change in its context and language.

What therefore is called for today for the Sikhs themselves as well as for the total Indian society, is to re-read and re-interpret Sikhism and Sikh society from an altogether new intellectual approach.

Any religion and religious society has a creed and a behavioural pattern that originate and evolve in a given time and space and hence within a given total social situation. Credal and doctrinal matters even, nothing to speak of the individual and collective behavioural pattern, cannot be understood without reference to this total social situation including its economic and political complex. At all stages this has constantly to be borne in mind. The approach to the study of the history of a religion and religious society has therefore to be, to my mind, sociological in the main. Metaphysical and ethical considerations even, cannot escape social conditioning of a sort.

Any such study must therefore begin with a close critical and analytical study of the texts—scriptural, canonical, literary, social or socio-legal and historical including biographical—of the religion and religious community concerned. In the case of Sikhism and the Sikh society the main body of such texts would consist of the *Sri Guru Granth Sāheb* itself, the *Nāmsākhis*, the *Rehātnāmās*, the *Dasam Granth* comprising all the writings of Guru Gobind Singh, and the later writings of the leaders and leading organisations of the community. This would call for what is technically called textual criticism which would involve in its turn, subjecting of each single text to a rigorous philological and linguistic analysis and historical criticism with a view to establishing the authenticity or otherwise of the text concerned. This kind of textual criticism is indeed the first step towards understanding and appreciating a religion and religious society, not as helpless children of the faith but as intelligent and knowledgeable adults. No one need be afraid

that knowledge of and about a religion should undermine one's faith in the fundamental tenets of the given religion ; that knowledge is an antithesis of faith is a prejudice that has long lost its validity.

Secondly, what is called for is an application of the principles of what is called the discipline of the sociology of religion. In the case of Sikhism it would involve not only a close analytical study of the doctrines and practices of the faith including the teachings of Guru Nānak as well as of his significant successor Gurus, one by one, in theory and practice, but also of all other contemporary and earlier faiths and cults with which Sikhism had anything to do at any time of its history down to its confrontation with Christianity and the Arya Samāj movement in the Panjab. In this connection it is important to remember that the images and symbols rituals, and modes of worship, the behavioural pattern, the nature and character of the charisma of the leaders, and of the institutional organization of the respective faiths and cults are as important as the words of the sacred texts and the creeds and doctrines of respective faiths themselves. The latter does not supersede the former; indeed, the understanding of the totality of a faith depends on both, one supplementing and complementing the other.

And thirdly, the origin and evolution of a religion and its nature and character are also to a very large extent conditioned and/or determined by contemporary social, political and economic forces and factors in operation at given times and spaces. In the case of Sikhism one has therefore to take into account these forces and factors from about the end of the fourteenth to about the middle of the eighteenth century in the main, but also later until our own times, the latter, to enable us understand the nature and character of the transformation that Sikhism and Sikh

society have been undergoing because of the introduction and willing acceptance of a new productive system in our 'midst. One has also to take into account in this connection the reasons and circumstances that led to the reform movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

These three considerations that I have just placed before you must be taken up and worked out simultaneously, by experts in the respective fields, and their results published and discussed and examined by a knowledgeable and intelligent public so as to encourage a public debate on an intellectual plane. It is only then that we can really build up an intellectual discipline of what we may call the sociology of Sikhism and the Sikh society. What we have been doing so far is not likely to lead us anywhere, I am afraid.

I do not know if what I have trying to impress upon you, will have any response in your mind. I am afraid, it may not. But I must leave it at that.

This seminar has however been convened, I must confess, with that end in view, an end that I have sought to place before you. We are very keen that Sikh studies should be taken up in all seriousness and earnestness, and such studies should be pursued systematically, in an objective and scientific manner, in accordance with accepted and well tried out principles and methodologies of philology and linguistics, comparative religion and sociology of religion, all in the context of social, political and economic history. A certain attention to speculative thought in regard to matters credal and doctrinal and to ethical considerations will also be called for, I am sure, and this need not be ruled out.

If this seminar can succeed in creating the beginning of such a consciousness, it will have served its purpose.

**A Select
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